

**Two Visions of the Nation-State: A Comparative Analysis of Heinrich von Treitschke
and Ernest Renan's Conceptions of the Nation-State and Nationality.**

Paul Sischy

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
History**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec Canada**

December 2007

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ISBN: 978-0-494-40813-1

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ISBN: 978-0-494-40813-1

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Abstract

Two Visions of the Nation-State: A Comparative Analysis of Heinrich von Treitschke and Ernest Renan's Conceptions of the Nation-State and Nationality.

Paul Sischy

In the late nineteenth century, the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke and the French historian Ernest Renan proposed competing conceptions of the nation-state and nationality. Treitschke's organicist conception saw nation-states as primordial entities that have permanent characteristics and whose interests stood above those of the individual. Renan's voluntarist conception saw nation-states as modern entities entered into on an individual basis, which were not defined according to an ethno-linguistic criterion. This thesis analyzes these conceptions as they were put forth in Treitschke's and Renan's primary works on the subject, as well as in their responses to the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71) and Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, which Treitschke supported and Renan opposed. Lastly, it examines the relationship of Treitschke's and Renan's conceptions of the nation-state to the dominant historical discourses of each historian's respective country. In doing so, it demonstrates that Treitschke's thought was consistently guided by his belief that humanity is unequal and that the interests of the nation-state exist as the highest ideal. For Treitschke the essence of the nation-state lay in its ability to express its will either through the submission of its members or in its interaction with other nation-states. In contrast, Renan's thought is guided by his belief that humanity is the highest ideal and that international relations should be guided according to this ideal. Whereas Treitschke's conception of the nation-state was reflective of nineteenth century German historiography, Renan's was less so with respect to French historiography of the period.

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Introduction

In the historiography of nationalism studies, the longest standing debate over what constitutes a nation is between a “voluntarist” and “organicist” understanding of the nation. Generally speaking, the voluntarist conception of the nation “regarded the nation as a free association of rational human beings entered voluntarily on an individual basis.”¹ In contrast, the organic type viewed the nation as “an organism of fixed and indelible character which was stamped on its members at birth and from which they could never free themselves.”² Thus, organic nationalism

holds that the world consists of natural nations, and has always done so; that nations are the bedrock of history and the chief actors in the historical drama; that nations and their characters are organisms that can easily be ascertained by their cultural differentiae; that the members of nations may, and frequently have, lost their national self-consciousness along with their independence; and that the duty of nationalists is to restore that self-consciousness and independence to the ‘reawakened’ organic nation.³

In contrast, the voluntarist conception of the nation views nations as modern entities and generally finds every tenet held by organic nationalists as “questionable, if not unacceptable.”⁴ In the voluntarist conception of the nation:

The world does not consist of ‘natural’ nations, except thinking makes it so, nor are nations to be likened to evolving organisms; on the contrary nations and nationality are logically and historically contingent phenomena. Before the modern epoch, nations were largely unknown and human beings had a multiplicity of collective loyalties; religious communities, cities, empires and kingdoms were the chief collective actors, above all the village and district level, and the outlook of most

¹ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 146.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

human beings were strictly local. Nor is it easy to define the character and ascertain the cultural differentiae of many nations in the contemporary world, given the multiplicity of overlapping identities in which individuals are enmeshed.⁵

According to Anthony D. Smith, a leading expert in the field of nationalism studies,⁶ the conceptions of the nation-state and nationality as put forth, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, by the French historian, Ernest Renan (1823-1892), and the German historian, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), represent the *locus classicus* for the debate between the voluntarist and organicist understanding of the nation.⁷

This debate first took form during the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871) in which Germany annexed the French provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. For Treitschke, the annexation of the French provinces was justified according to an ethno-linguistic, hence organicist, conception of the nation and nationality. Renan's voluntarist conception of the nation and nationality, as outlined in his 1882 lecture *What is a nation?*, was delivered in response to Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and sought to discredit the ethno-linguistic conception of the nation as a basis for territorial expansion. Thus, historians of nationalism have frequently presented Treitschke's and Renan's work as an intellectual debate between two competing visions of the nation-state and nationality though for varying purposes.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anthony D. Smith is the author of numerous works on nationalism and the historiography of nationalism studies. He has been described as "the leading specialist on nationalism." As quoted by Ernest Gellner. "Do Nations Have Navels?," *The Warwick Debates on Nationalism. Held in Coventry, GB, 24 October 1995*, in *Nationality and Nationalism*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 432.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover: New England U.P., 2000), 11.

The first to do so was Hans Kohn in his influential work *The Idea of Nationalism* (1944), which was written and published at the height of the Second World War.⁸ Kohn presented Treitschke's and Renan's competing views as indicative of two ideological versions of nationalism. Whereas Renan's voluntarist conception was representative of the nationalism most prevalent in the West, that is to say, west of the Rhine, in countries such as France, the Low Countries, and especially Britain and America, Treitschke's organicist view, was indicative of the dominant type of nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and much of Asia.⁹

Likewise, in 1966, Otto Pflanze contended that Treitschke and Renan's perspectives were indicative of a "basic dualism in European thought upon the subject of nationality" which he believed was the product of two varying historical experiences to the east and west of the Rhine.¹⁰ Pflanze argued that the "Atlantic world" witnessed the rise of "state-nations" meaning "the idea of the nation developed within the chrysalis of the state." In this phenomenon, "common sovereignty provided common institutions and a common political tradition from which emerged a sense of nationhood which transcended cultural differences."¹¹ In contrast, central and eastern Europe witnessed the rise of "nation-states" in which "the idea of the nation could only develop within the chrysalis of the individual culture, for here ethnic groups were either radically divided

⁸ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of its Origins and Background* (New Brunswick N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1944), 581-582.

⁹ Ibid, 3-24. Smith, *The Nation in History*, 6-7. For Kohn on Treitschke see, Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples: Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 106-130. Kohn's dichotomy between Western and Eastern nationalisms has been heavily criticized for its moralistic exaggeration of the distinction, its geographical focus, which overlooked important exceptions and its over-sharp delineation of the two types of nationalism. Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 40.

¹⁰ Otto Pflanze, "Nationalism in Europe, 1848-1871," *The Review of Politics*, 28 (April 1966): 139.

¹¹ Ibid.

into many political fragments” or “totally contained within the frontiers of great empires.” In these cases, Pflanze argued, the “nation was first defined as a cultural rather than a political entity. The growth of national consciousness created a demand for the creation of the “nation-state.”¹² Moreover, Pflanze saw Treitschke and Renan’s opposing conceptions of the nation-state and nationality as reflective of a “cleavage” in European intellectual culture. Whereas Renan’s conception of the nation and nationality was indicative of the western European tradition of popular sovereignty in which national identity was based upon a sense of mutual identity arising from a common past and the expectation of a common future, Treitschke’s thought was representative of central and eastern Europe which saw nationality as an “objective force whose unceasing motion produces the unique culture of each nation.”¹³

More recent historians of nationalism have continued to cite Treitschke and Renan’s opposing views on the nation-state and nationality though, unlike Kohn or Pflanze their treatments have analyzed their work, particularly Renan’s, in a historiographical context.¹⁴ In this context, Treitschke’s and Renan’s opposing conceptions of the nation-state and nationality are viewed as some of the earliest expressions of theoretical investigations into the twin phenomena of nations and nationalism in a field which only began to recognize itself as such in the 1960s.¹⁵ Thus, contemporary analyses of Treitschke’s and Renan’s debate have focused on the different motivations behind their investigations into the question of nations and nationalism and

¹² Ibid, 139-140.

¹³ Ibid, 140.

¹⁴ Renan’s “What is a nation?” has been reprinted in several different compendiums on nationalism and theories of nationalism. These include Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?,” in *Nationality and Nationalism*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby, 27-40; Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?” trans, Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8-23.

¹⁵ Stuart Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 5.

how and why their intentions differ from more recent theories. As Smith, writes, these early commentaries on the principle of nationality were “written with specific political developments in mind [and] there [was] no attempt to fashion a general theory applicable to all cases, or to resolve the antinomies of each issue in a coherent and systematic manner.”¹⁶ Rather, as Paul Lawrence points out, “interest in nationalism at this stage was largely ethical and philosophical. Instead of searching for underlying causes or general trends, the scholars of the period were more concerned with the merits and defects of the doctrine than with the spread of national phenomena.”¹⁷ Moreover, “not only did many authors range themselves *for* or *against* the abstract doctrine of nationalism, but most were writing in active support of, or opposition to, specific nationalisms.”¹⁸

Indeed, this is true of both Treitschke’s and Renan’s discussions on nationality. Treitschke’s conception of the nation-state and nationality was completely oriented by his political motives and as this thesis will demonstrate his discussion on these issues was tailored to meet what he saw as the political demands of the day. Renan’s discussion on the nation-state and nationality was also motivated by political demands, namely what he saw as the threat of ethnographic politics. Yet, his conception of the nation and nationality, while euro-centric, was one of “the first to aspire to an *analytical* methodology” meaning his investigation was more methodical as it looked at the rise and meaning of several nations and nationalities as they existed throughout Europe.¹⁹ Lastly, contemporary historians of nationalism, such as Smith and Lawrence, have presented Treitschke’s and Renan’s contrasting views as an actual debate. In their rendering,

¹⁶ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 10.

¹⁷ Paul Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory* (Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Limited, 2005), 17.

¹⁸ Ibid, 18. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁹ Ibid, 36. Author’s emphasis.

Renan's *What is a nation?* lecture was intended as a direct critique of Treitschke personally.²⁰ While undoubtedly the intent of Renan's speech was to discredit the particularly German organicist view of the nation and nationality, of which Treitschke was a leading exponent, the research undertaken in the writing of this thesis was unable to produce any explicit reference whereby Renan stated that the intent of his work was directed at Treitschke personally.²¹ Thus, in this thesis Treitschke's and Renan's opposing views on the nation-state and nationality will be treated as a conceptual debate in which each writer's position, while opposing the other, did not directly reference the other by name.

This thesis employs a comparative approach. Its intention is to provide a more complete analysis of Treitschke's and Renan's discussions on the nation-state and nationality than have appeared in the historiography of this debate. Chapters one and two analyze Treitschke's and Renan's conceptions of the nation-state and nationality, respectively, as they were put forth in their main works on the subject. Chapters three and four examine Treitschke's and Renan's responses to the events of the Franco-Prussian war and the question of the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Chapter five analyzes Treitschke's and Renan's conceptions of the nation-state and nationality

²⁰ In Smith's words, Renan "delivered [his speech] to counter the militarist nationalism of Heinrich Treitschke." Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 9. Smith describes the debate as such in numerous works, *The Nation in History*, 11. ; *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 36. Paul Lawrence, makes a similar claim stating that Renan's *What is a nation?* was both a response to the "ongoing territorial disputes over the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine" and "was also, in part, a direct response and challenge to the work of Treitschke and his theoretical justifications of national expansion." Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 34.

²¹ When asked to clarify his references to Renan's speech as such Smith stated that to his knowledge Renan's speech was not directed specifically at Treitschke personally. On this same matter, Lawrence was unable to provide a definitive answer stating that he could not locate the source from which he based his claim. Anthony D. Smith "RE: Question concerning Renan's *What is a Nation?* for Prof. Smith." Email to Paul Sischy. 21 June 2007. Paul Lawrence "RE: Question concerning Renan's *What is a nation?*." Email to Paul Sischy. 27 June 2007.

according to the historiographical climate in which they were produced as well the philosophical foundations that guided German and French historiography in the nineteenth century. The conclusion will examine Treitschke's and Renan's discussions comparatively and discuss the fundamental differences between their two views.

In doing so, this thesis will demonstrate that Treitschke put the will of the nation-state above the will of the individual. This is evident in his identification of the state as power and according to the ethno-linguistic criteria by which he identified nationality. Moreover, Treitschke's position was rooted in his view of humankind as fundamentally unequal and of the existence of the state as the highest ideal of human history. Treitschke's views were reflective of philosophical positions that were common within the German historical discourse in the nineteenth century. With regard to Renan, this thesis will demonstrate that Renan believed that nationality was defined by the individual's will. Unlike Treitschke, Renan held humanity as the highest ideal which he believed should guide international relations and exist as superior to national aspirations. Renan's views, while representative of some elements of nineteenth century French historiography, were fundamentally opposed to others. Both, Treitschke and Renan's discussions on the nation-state and nationality were oriented by their fundamental beliefs and thus served as the basis for their positions.

Chapter One: Heinrich von Treitschke and the nation-state

Treitschke's views on the nation-state and nationality are best represented in his work, *Politics*, first published in two volumes in 1897-98 following his death in 1896. The work is based upon a course of the same name Treitschke taught throughout his academic career and was compiled and carefully collated from the notebooks of more than a dozen of his students.¹ Consequently, *Politics* has a peculiar quality in both its structure and substance as the notes it consulted span a range of over twenty years. Thus, as Treitschke's foremost biographer, Andreas Dorpalen, suggests, *Politics* should be "read with some care" as "different layers of [Treitschke's] thinking have been processed into one account, incorporating ideas which he did not hold at all times."² Nevertheless, the "gist of the work," Dorpalen writes, "is no doubt accurate" and serves as the clearest example of his view of the nation-state.³

It should be noted that in its book form *Politics* does not adequately evoke the experience of Treitschke's lectures for the course. The course resembled more of a "solemn ceremony" than a conventional university lecture and proved to be the most popular the University of Berlin offered. Those in attendance included students from all of the university's departments as well as writers, editors, German officers and

¹ Treitschke first gave the course at the University of Freiburg in 1863 and repeated the course every year during the twenty-two years he taught in Berlin beginning in 1875-1876. Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples: Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism*, 129. Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 208.

² Andreas Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke*. (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1957), 228.

³ Ibid.

professionals and high-school students.⁴ Dorpalen describes the experience of Treitschke's lectures as the following:

The auditorium would be filled long before the appointed hour, the front benches occupied by an enthusiastic clique of upperclassmen and junior officers and officials. Treitschke would come in, followed by a number of his colleagues who would sit on special chairs on the lecture platform. Every few moments wild bursts of clapping and stamping, the German student's traditional sign of approval, would punctuate his oration. And when he had finished, his colleagues, like a guard of honor, would escort him from the classroom to the thunderous applause of the audience.⁵

In the reminiscences of Treitschke's students one can sense what Dorpalen describes as the "militancy, the assertiveness, the frenzy of these lectures which made them so memorable and so fateful an experience."⁶ As one student noted, Treitschke's "delivery was kind of howling without period and comma, in a wave like rhythm which did not correspond to the meaning of his sentences . . . It took a while until you understood him."⁷ Yet, the same student attests to Treitschke's eloquence and the effect his oratorical style had upon his listeners:

Without haste, yet literally without rest, he would pour out from the treasure of an inexhaustible vocabulary a continuous stream of language every sentence in perfect construction as though read from one of his books. He never faltered unless overcome by feeling, for his passions were vehement. Beginning his lecture directly he had ascended the rostrum, he gave you no breathing space until he had spoken his full three-quarters of an hour or hour and a half, as the case might be, and then suddenly and without warning the voice ceased, and a moment later he disappeared. Yet a more finished, more concise, more logical manner of address was seldom heard.⁸

⁴ Ibid, 227.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 228.

⁷ Ibid, 227.

⁸ Ibid.

These Berlin lectures, in which Treitschke would attempt to indoctrinate his listeners with his “teutomanic, imperialist and anti-Semitic ideas,”⁹ were widely attended by the future elites of Wilhelmine Germany including Heinrich Class, later the head of the Pan-German League, Alfred von Tirpitz, the creator of the German Imperial Navy, and the sociologist Max Weber.¹⁰ “No historian,” writes Jarausch, “exerted a comparable influence on the leading stratum of the German Empire.”¹¹ According to Kohn, Treitschke’s notoriety during his academic career and his subsequent legacy as the preeminent “national prophet” of German society in the late nineteenth century stems, as much or more, from the fiery lectures he delivered in his Politics courses as from his written historical works, since these lectures represented the “most important single vehicle for spreading Treitschke’s ideas.”¹² The course’s stated aim was to inspire German youth everywhere and through it Treitschke became the “most influential political lecturer of the German Empire.”¹³ Thus, *Politics* had a stated political purpose. Undoubtedly, Treitschke conceived of his ideas as an “academic rationale for Bismarckian Realpolitik” and as justifications for the expansion of the German Empire.¹⁴ More generally, Jarausch states, *Politics* represents a “sustained diatribe against the

⁹ Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany Since 1800*, (Providence: Berghen Books, 1997), 30.

¹⁰ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 234, 239.

¹¹ Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics*, 209.

¹² Hans Kohn, introduction to *Politics*, by Heinrich von Treitschke (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), xii.

¹³ Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics*, 209.

¹⁴ Ibid, 211. Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 227. Treitschke saw the expansion of the German empire as a necessity: “All great nations in the fullness of their strength have desired to set their mark upon barbarian lands. All over the globe today we see the peoples of Europe creating a mighty aristocracy of the white races. Those who take no share in this great rivalry will play a pitiable part in time to come. The colonizing impulse has become a vital question for a great nation.” Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics*: abridged, edited, and with an introduction by Hans Kohn: Translated by Blanche Dugdale and Torben de Bille. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 64.

Democratic tradition in Central Europe.”¹⁵ Indeed, Treitschke was enormously disdainful of the democratic principle, as he scorned parliamentarianism and denounced what he referred to as the “democratic tyranny (majority rule).”¹⁶ Yet, Treitschke also proposed that *Politics* was representative of basic historical laws and moral imperatives, which while serving his political platform were also truths in themselves. *Politics*, Treitschke stated,

sought to recognize the basic concepts of the state by looking at the real political world, to scrutinize historically what nations have desired, created, and achieved in political life, and [to probe] the causes; thereby it shall . . . also succeed in finding some historical laws and in erecting moral imperatives.¹⁷

The means by which Treitschke attempted to arrive at this outcome was through his conception of the state, which in *Politics* functions as the work's overarching premise. Essentially, Treitschke viewed the state as the dominant power in society as it alone acts as a legal, military and moral authority. As such Treitschke demanded that the state's interests were superior to individual interests and that citizens had to submit to the state's will to ensure that its power was preserved. Thus, Treitschke's discussion of the nation and nationality are all incorporated into his conception of the state. This conception will be the subject of this chapter.

Treitschke defines the state as “the people, legally united as an independent entity.”¹⁸ By “people” he means “a number of families permanently living side by

¹⁵ Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics*, 211.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Treitschke, *Politics*, 3.

side.”¹⁹ Treitschke contends that this “definition implies that the State is primordial and necessary, that it is enduring as history, and no less essential to mankind than speech.”²⁰ Treitschke’s use of the term “primordial”, thereby implying that states have existed from time immemorial, is based upon a rationale which views humankind as “historical being(s),” born with an inherent sense of “political genius,” which expressed itself in the creation of primitive forms of states.²¹ These states were composed out of ethnic groups or what Treitschke terms “blood relationships.”²² “Aboriginal families” were the first examples of these groups and the domination of the father or “chief” over these groups represented the earliest example of what Treitschke terms, the “political principle of subordination.”²³ For Treitschke, the importance of the political principle of subordination is that it confirms that the “strength” or power of the state is based on what he terms humans’ “positive rights” by which he means our base instincts.²⁴ Thus, Treitschke’s argument is that in its origins humankind organized itself into primitive forms of states and that this process is representative of humankind’s natural development. Furthermore, these primitive groupings existed as ethnic enclaves distinct from one another. From this example Treitschke concludes: “The assertion that mankind in the beginning looked upon itself as one, is the opposite of truth. Humanity at the first

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. Indeed, Treitschke contends that man’s political capacity is an inherent quality: “Man is driven by his political instinct to construct a constitution as inevitably as he constructs language.” Ibid, 5.

²² Ibid, 6. Treitschke contends that the division of people into distinct ethnic groups was the natural result of the human need to procreate. Thus, the assumption is that humans only sought to procreate amongst those of the same race. Ibid, 5-6.

²³ Ibid, 5.

²⁴ Ibid, 6.

cannot be otherwise conceived than as constituted in small groups; that is the primitive form of the small State.”²⁵

Thus, Treitschke contends that the example of the primordial state is evidence that humankind’s natural tendency is *to not* perceive of itself as part of a greater collective humanity in which individuals, despite their many differences, are seen as fundamentally equal. According to Treitschke the conjoined concepts of “humanity” and the “natural equality of man” were decidedly unnatural as they relate to humankind’s historical and political development.²⁶ It is both “historically and physiologically untrue”, states Treitschke “that human beings enter upon existence first as men, and afterwards as compatriots.”²⁷ Treitschke contends that modern national consciousness is reflective of this process, “as a man feels himself primarily a German or a Frenchman and only in the second place as a man in the wider sense.”²⁸ Thus, for Treitschke human history had enacted itself in such a way that one’s political consciousness, manifested as a national identity, had preceded any belief in a shared sense of humanity.

Treitschke proposes that the notion of humanity was introduced by the rise of Christianity and Christ’s message of the universal brotherhood of man.²⁹ This message, he argues, did not come naturally to humankind but rather “has to be assimilated through doctrine and education.”³⁰ Thus, Treitschke’s argument is that the primordial character

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ As stated previously, Treitschke saw historical and political developments as coterminous processes.

²⁷ Treitschke, *Politics*, 6.

²⁸ Ibid, 6.

²⁹ Ibid, 6.

³⁰ Ibid, 6. Treitschke’s rejection of the Christian precept of ‘the brotherhood of man’ was not a wholesale rejection of Christianity. Treitschke saw Christianity as a necessary condition in the life of the state as it acts as a safeguard against the state’s influence over its citizen’s individual consciences. The importance of Christianity, Treitschke argues, was that it secured that “man cannot be a mere member of the State, the recognition of the immortal and individual soul in every man, and of man’s right to think freely concerning

of the state, in which humankind grouped itself along ethnic lines, and the enactment of the principle of political subordination—the domination of one group over another—demonstrates that mankind is essentially unequal. The result, he contends is that “all political thinking [must] postulate [man’s] natural inequality, for only thus is the subordination of some groups to others to be explained.”³¹

Following this line of reasoning Treitschke contends that if a people’s innate political capacity is “to be further developed, it is quite inaccurate to call the State a necessary evil.”³² Rather, he states: “The evolution of the State is, broadly speaking, nothing but the necessary outward form which the inner life of a people bestows upon itself, and that peoples attain to that form of government which their moral capacity enables them to reach.”³³ Therefore, in Treitschke’s view, the life of the state represents the highest ideals a people can aspire to. Consequently, the state, Treitschke contends, is a moral community.³⁴ “The State is a moral community; it is called upon to make positive efforts for the education of the human race, and its final aim is that a people may shape for themselves a real character in it, and by means of it.”³⁵

God and divine things.”³⁰ Thus, Treitschke’s rejection of Christianity is limited to its universal belief that all individuals are alike and are thus equal. H.W. Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*. (New York: Scribner, 1915), 121.

³¹ Treitschke, *Politics*, 6-7. In regards to the apparent contradiction in Treitschke’s contention that humankind is both created in God’s image and fundamentally unequal, Kohn states it best, commenting: “Treitschke’s efforts to harmonize his belief that all men are created in God’s image and his faith in the necessary inequality of men and races and in their divisions into masters and subjects are remarkable.”

Hans Kohn, ed., *Politics*, by Heinrich von Treitschke (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 310.

³² Treitschke, *Politics*, 7.

³³ Ibid, 8.

³⁴ Montserrat Guibernau, *Nationalisms: The Nation-state and Nationalism in the twentieth century*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 7. Treitschke derived the notion of the state as a moral community from Aristotle. Treitschke was a great admirer of the ancient philosopher and the title and course name of his own *Politics* was chosen in emulation of Aristotle’s *magnum opus*. Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 228.

³⁵ Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*, 135.

Thus, Treitschke contends that the evolution of the state, is “inherently necessary” for humankind. As such its laws and mores should be seen as both a representation of the “objectively revealed Will of God” as well as “the power of genius or of creative Will in history.”³⁶ “Only through [the State]” Treitschke contends, can a people’s “moral development be perfected, for the living sense of citizenship inspires the community in the same way as a sense of duty inspires the individual.”³⁷ Therefore, in Treitschke’s view, the state functions as the vehicle through which a people’s best moral energies can express themselves.

A fundamental component of Treitschke’s conception of the state is his view of the state as an individual. Essentially, Treitschke transfers the individuality normally accorded to the individual to the state itself.³⁸ Thus, as an individual, the state, Treitschke contends, has a corresponding unique personality, which possesses permanent characteristics. Moreover, much like an individual has a corresponding will that exists as independent from any other so too can the same claim be made for the state. Treitschke contends that the state’s individuality resides in it being the only force within society that can administer justice and wage war.

In regards to the state’s legal function, Treitschke contends that just as man by exercising his will in law has a legal personality so too does the state.³⁹ On this point he states:

Our German jurisprudence was the first to abandon the theory of Roman Law, which regarded the conception of personality as bound up with the

³⁶ Treitschke, *Politics*, 8. For Treitschke the essence of “political genius” is one that is “national.” Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 31.

³⁸ Treitschke’s view of the state as an individual is rooted in historicist thought and Herder’s theory of individuality. These concepts and their connection to Treitschke’s conception of the state will be considered in Chapter Five.

³⁹ Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics*, 10.

individual, and it defined legal personality by competence to act in law. In this way the dictum becomes applicable to the State as well, for the State is the people's collective will.⁴⁰

Thus, Treitschke contends that states' legal personalities, in "the juridical" and "politico-moral sense," allows one to speak "of their individuality."⁴¹ He writes, "Even as certain people have certain traits, which they cannot alter however much they try, so also the State has characteristics, which cannot be obliterated."⁴² Thus, "the State, then has for all time been a legal person" in the "historico-moral sense."⁴³

With respect to Treitschke's second condition, that the state's individuality is defined through its ability to wage war, he states, "It is the right of arms, which distinguishes the state from all other forms of corporate life."⁴⁴ Treitschke places an immense importance upon the state's ability to engage in the international arena. His view is rooted in his perception of history as a great drama, in which humankind is in a state of perpetual conflict over resources and material wealth. In this rendering, the state is the vehicle through which society expresses itself as a collective unit, and is thus the main actor within this drama of history.⁴⁵ As such, states, Treitschke writes, "must be conceived as the great collective personalities of history."⁴⁶ For Treitschke the state's ability to protect and defend its territory represents one of its most fundamental criteria.

We have described the State as an independent force. This pregnant theory of independence implies firstly so absolute a moral supremacy that the State cannot legitimately tolerate any power above its own, and

⁴⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Heinrich von Treitschke, "Politics," in Guibernau, *Nationalisms*, 7.

⁴⁵ Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*, 129.

⁴⁶ Treitschke, *Politics*, 11.

secondly a temporal freedom entailing a variety of material resources adequate to its protection against hostile influences. Legal sovereignty, the States complete independence of any other earthly power, is so rooted in its nature that it may be said to be its very standard and criterion.⁴⁷

According to Treitschke, the state attains to self-realization through intercourse with those who challenge it. Thus, Treitschke views war as an essential function of the state, which is apparent in three ways. First, it is the means through which states become formally recognized in the international arena. Secondly, the state's ability to fight and defend itself represents one of its primary functions. Third, Treitschke argues that war is a permanent feature of civilized life and is the primary means through which a state exercises its inherent will. "Without war", Treitschke contends, "no State could be. All those we know of arose through war, and the protection of their members by armed force remains their primary and essential task."⁴⁸ War, in Treitschke's view, is a natural act, and as such, he glorifies conflict between states as both a necessary and positive feature of history. He states, "War therefore will endure to the end of history, as long as there is a multiplicity of States. The laws of human thought and of human nature forbid any alternative, neither is one to be wished for."⁴⁹ Man's inherent nature as reflected in the form of the state and its competition with other states renders war, in Treitschke's view, as "a necessary and beneficial activity of the State."⁵⁰ "In this eternal conflict of separate States," Treitschke writes, "lies the beauty of History; the wish to do away with this rivalry is simply unintelligent."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁸ Treitschke, *Politics*, 38.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*, 130.

⁵¹ Treitschke, "Politics," in Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*, 130.

Treitschke's glorification of war is ultimately an expression of the two principles that guide his conception of the state. The first, as has already been discussed, is his conception of the state as an individual. For Treitschke, a state's interaction with other states in the international arena serves as the context that is most demonstrative of their individuality. On this point he states:

In State treaties it is the will of the State, which is expressed, not the personal desires of the individuals who conclude them, and the treaty is binding as long as the contracting State exists. When a State is incapable of enforcing its will, or of maintaining law and order at home and prestige abroad, it becomes an anomaly and falls prey either to anarchy or a foreign enemy.⁵²

Secondly, along with the administration of justice, conflict serves as the exercise through which the state expresses its will. For Treitschke the state's ability to express its will is what defines it and underlies its essence. Indeed, as Kohn states, in Treitschke's conception of the state, "will is the essence of the State—not ethics, reason, or usefulness, but will independent of these criteria."⁵³ As such Treitschke comes to identify the state as a manifestation of power, as the state relies on its power to express its will. Thus, he proposes a new definition of the state, stating,

If we examine our definition of the State as "the people legally united as an independent entity," we find that it can be more briefly put thus: "The State is the public force for Offence and Defense." It is above all, Power, which makes its will to prevail.⁵⁴

Thus, for Treitschke, the state exercises its power through its roles as a moralizing agency, a legal authority and its ability to wage war. "The State is power", Treitschke

⁵² Treitschke, *Politics*, 11.

⁵³ Kohn, ed., *Politics*, by Heinrich von Treitschke, 311.

⁵⁴ Treitschke, *Politics*, 14.

claims, “precisely in order to assert itself as against other equally independent powers. War and the administration of justice are the chief tasks of even the most barbaric States.”⁵⁵ These tasks Treitschke contends are only “conceivable where a plurality of States are found existing side by side,” hence his belief in the necessity of conflict amongst states and his glorification of war within history.⁵⁶

Thus, for Treitschke the state’s “function is merely protective and administrative.”⁵⁷ Its purpose is to “surround the whole, regulating and protecting it.”⁵⁸ The state, Treitschke argues,

can only work by an external compulsion; it only represents the people from the point of view of power. Even this implies a great deal. For in the State is not only the arena for the great primitive forces of human nature; it is also the basis of all national life. In short, a people, which is not in a position to create and maintain under the wing of the State an external organization of its own intellectual existence deserves to perish.⁵⁹

Thus, Treitschke characterizes the state as “universally and genuinely just” as it represents the sole power within society that administers justice and protects its people and territory.⁶⁰ As Dorpalen writes, Treitschke conceives of the state, as

the indispensable iron framework within which the anarchical and conflicting aspirations of a selfish society must be kept under control. The

⁵⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Treitschke cites the example of the “Jewish race” as one, which “affords the most tragic example of a richly gifted nation, who were incapable of defending their State, and are now scattered to the ends of the earth. Their life is crippled for no man can belong to two nations at once.” Ibid. Jarausch argues that Treitschke was not a racial but a cultural anti-Semite. Thus, in Jarausch’s characterization, Treitschke’s anti-Semitism was based on his view of Jews as “an element of national disintegration,” and he demanded that they “assimilate into the people whose state they belong to.” Heinrich von Treitschke, “Politics,” in Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics*, 211.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 30.

state is viewed primarily as an instrument of protection and order, and it fulfills these functions with the help of its power resources.⁶¹

Indeed, for Treitschke the benefit of a state based on power was that it could control the various conflicting interests within society thus eliminating the need for parliamentarianism or the expansion of suffrage, both of which he abhorred.⁶² For Treitschke the state's ability to function as such rendered it sacred. On this point he states,

Law and peace and order cannot spring from the manifold and eternally clashing interests of society, but from the power, which stands above it, armed with the strength to restrain its wild passions. It is here that we get a clear idea of what we may speak of as the moral sanctity of the State. The State it is which brings justice and mercy into this struggling world.⁶³

Thus, Treitschke's disdain for democracy and his conception of the state as power culminated in his contention that the relationship between the state and its population is not dictated by the consent of the governed. Rather, the state, Treitschke argues, as the "highest external community of men" requires the complete submission of its members.⁶⁴

Treitschke's argument is that for the state's "will to prevail" its citizens are required to submit themselves to the will of the state. "Submission," Treitschke contends, "is what the State primarily requires; it insists upon acquiescence; its very essence is the accomplishment of its will."⁶⁵ Essentially, Treitschke's demand for the submission of society to the will of the State is to ensure the continuance of the state's primary functions. Treitschke contends that the state's primary functions cannot work

⁶¹ Dorplean, *Treitschke*, 229.

⁶² Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics*, 211.

⁶³ Treitschke, *Politics*, 27.

⁶⁴ Treitschke, "Politics," in Guibernau, *Nationalisms*, 8.

⁶⁵ Treitschke, *Politics*, 14

unless the society, which they regulate, obeys the state's will. Any failure to obey the state would result in the gradual dissolution of society into a state of anarchy.

Consequently, Treitschke's discussion within *Politics* on the individual's acquiescence to the state takes the form of a demand rather than a plea. He states,

The nation is not entirely comprised in the state, but the State protects and embraces the people's life, regulating its external aspects on every side. It does not ask primarily for opinion, but demands obedience, and its laws must be obeyed, whether willingly or no.⁶⁶

Thus, for Treitschke, one's obedience to the will of the state can be either voluntary or compulsory. Either form of submission is acceptable. Ultimately the state requires obedience in any form in order to ensure that the sources of its power are preserved. For Treitschke, Davis states, "spontaneous obedience, based upon reasoned approval of the law is what the State most desires." Yet, "the State can exist when the obedience which it receives is merely rendered under compulsion."⁶⁷

The significance of Treitschke's demand for one's submission to the state is that it renders the state's interests as above those of the individual. The state's will contradicts and overrides the will of the individual. Thus, reduced to its core, Treitschke's argument is that the relationship between the individual and the state will always be determined by the superiority of the state. The sheer strength of the state's character, as the legal, military and moral power within society, renders it superior to the individual. As a result of having argued that the state is superior to the individual, Treitschke rejects the democratic view of the state as simply a means for its citizens to reach a desired end.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁷ Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*, 131.

To regard the State as nothing but a means for the citizen's end is to place the subjective aspect too high. The greatness of the State lies precisely in its power of uniting the past with the present and the future: and consequently no individual has the right to regard the State as the servant of his own aims but is bound by moral duty and physical necessity to subordinate himself to it, while the State lies under the obligation to concern itself with the life of its citizens by extending to them its help and protection.⁶⁸

As to how far the state's will extends its influence over the life of its citizens, Treitschke contends that the lessons of history demonstrate that the state's independent will achieves only the amount of power it needs to ensure its rule. "Historical experience," states Treitschke, "examined fairly and without prejudice teaches us that the State can overshadow practically the whole of a people's life. It will dominate it to the precise extent in which it is in a position to do so."⁶⁹ Thus, in Treitschke's view, theoretically no limit can be set to the functions of a state.⁷⁰ Rather, the minimum tasks a state must perform are those already discussed above, namely its military functions and its legal system.

While most of *Politics* discusses the role and function of the state, Treitschke does make some points relating to nationalism in general. Treitschke states that he uses the term "nation" in "the political sense" as "the meaning attached to it in ordinary speech" is "extremely capricious."⁷¹ Thus, he favors the use of the term "nationality" in order to "convey the idea of a common blood."⁷²

Treitschke divides the notion of nationality from statehood and recognizes the tensions between the two. While he acknowledges nationalities desire to create states of

⁶⁸ Treitschke, *Politics*, 35-36.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 36. Treitschke cites "Communitistic States" and modern day theocracies, such as the Jesuit state in Paraguay, as examples within history of states that overshadow the life its people.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 36-37.

⁷¹ Ibid, 122.

⁷² Ibid.

their own, he stays true to his earlier positions and continues to assert that the interests of the state are above those of the nation or nationality. His belief that “states do not arise out of the people’s sovereignty, but they are created against the will of the people” reveals his conception of the “nation as a subordinate creation of central, political authority.”⁷³ He justifies this position by arguing that the concept of nationality is not a “settled or permanent thing” and as such a state “must have the right to merge into one of the nationalities contained within itself.”⁷⁴ Yet, Treitschke did recognize the importance of nationality, in the sense of one’s awareness of one’s national identity and the devotion to the state one feels because of it. Thus, Treitschke both embraced nationality as a unifying agent within the state and rejected nationality as a principle, which sought to deliver a sovereign nation to all people who perceived themselves to be a nationality. His argument is as follows.

Treitschke regarded the rise of “the principle of nationality,” as a product of “the natural revulsion against the world-empire of Napoleon.”⁷⁵ Treitschke rejected those varieties of nationalism, which assumed the right to create sovereign nations, as they were, in his view, a challenge to the primacy of the state.⁷⁶ He wrote, “The unhappy attempt to transform the multiplicity of European life into the arid uniformity of universal sovereignty has produced the exclusive sway of nationality as the dominant political idea. Cosmopolitanism has receded too far.”⁷⁷ Treitschke argued that despite the rise of “national antagonisms” in the nineteenth century and the subsequent “talk of setting up a

⁷³ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 23.

⁷⁴ Treitschke, *Politics*, 124, 129.

⁷⁵ Treitschke, “Politics,” in Guibernau, *Nationalisms*, 12.

⁷⁶ It should be noted that Treitschke’s rejection of nationalism was not a rejection of pride in one’s people or nation-state, which Treitschke referred to as patriotism. Rather, it was the growth of the national principle and its challenge to the strength of the state that Treitschke was opposed to.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

principle of nationality” one must “keep our vision clear from the confusions of Napoleonic phraseology.”⁷⁸ Thus, Treitschke called upon his listeners to refrain from accepting the national principle as a given reality and instead to look at the relationship between nationalities and the state as they functioned throughout history. By doing so, he states, one can identify,

two strong forces working in history; firstly, the tendency of every State to amalgamate its population, in speech and manners, into one single mould, and secondly, the impulse of every vigorous nationality to construct a State of its own. It is obvious that we have here two divergent forces, which generally oppose and struggle against each other.⁷⁹

Thus, Treitschke seeks “to discover what settlement” could reconcile these two forces. His answer is that the “natural tendency is that the conceptions ‘Nation’ and ‘State’ should coincide with one another” as this is “the instinct of all great nations.”⁸⁰ Yet, Treitschke recognized that, while a state should ideally be based on nationality (i.e. a state should control a coherent and unitary nation), history has shown this is not inevitable. For instance, Treitschke cites the difference between Western Europe and the East, as an example of how states that are composed of a uniform nationality (ethnic makeup) are stronger as a result of being so. The West, he states, is composed of “larger and more compact ethnological masses” while the East is “the classic soil for the fragments of nations.”⁸¹ As a result of its fragmentary character, the East, Treitschke contends, bears great difficulty in attaining a sense of “inward unity.”⁸² Thus, Treitschke

⁷⁸ Treitschke, *Politics*, 123.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

concludes, “the unity of the State should be based on nationality” as this represents “the normal condition.”⁸³

Yet, Treitschke recognizes that nationality “is no permanent thing” by which he means that nationalities throughout history have been forcefully integrated into one another thus making it quite impossible to speak of a “purely national history,” meaning that nations have not developed as ethnically uniform.⁸⁴ Rather, Treitschke views history as having unfolded as a “great process of attrition” in which nations or nationalities have been forcefully integrated into one another.⁸⁵ He states,

It is impossible to expound the facts of history genealogically as if it were a family tree. We must rather say that even nationalities are subject to the currents of historical life, and it is equally instructive and difficult for the historian to trace out these ethnographical fluctuations.⁸⁶

Thus, nationality, Treitschke states, “forms part of the current of history.” As such nationalities are flexible and are vulnerable to the whims of historical progress.

“Almighty God,” Treitschke writes,

did not separate the nations into glass cases as if they were botanical specimens, and we can see for ourselves how history has molded them all. Nationality is no permanent thing; there are great nations whose original character and native genius have never quite been lost, but we can trace how it has mingled with other streams.⁸⁷

Thus, despite the intermixing of nationalities through various historical processes, such as the conquering of one nation by another, Treitschke maintains that the strength of a specific nationality’s character is not necessarily diluted via the enforced mixture of nations. Rather, he argues that “the power of the will” of those nations that formed their

⁸³ Ibid, 128.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 129.

⁸⁵ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 23.

⁸⁶ Treitschke, *Politics* 128.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 124.

own states is strengthened through these historical processes. He states, "In the powerful mill through which a nation is ground when it mingles with another, the softer sides of the character are easily destroyed, but the power of the will is fortified."⁸⁸ Indeed, Treitschke contends that within states, which harbor multiple nations, the nation that wields authority—that being the nation that successfully formed the state—is, compared to the nations over which it stands, "superior in civilization."⁸⁹

Therefore, according to Treitschke the concept of nationality, as it pertains to the "the principle of nationality" is not clearly discernable when viewed through the lens of historical study. Nations and the nationalities that comprise them are molded by history: thus they can and have changed over time. This does not mean that Treitschke dismissed the importance of the concept of the nation and nationalities as they relate to the state. As stated previously, he believed that ideally a state should be based upon a nationality. Rather, Treitschke's argument is that the principle of nationality is founded upon a perception which fails to concur with what he argued was historical reality. Treitschke takes this argument even further by referring to the 'imaginary nature' of the blood ties that were often presumed to link the nation.

In what can only be considered as a rather surprising statement for a figure notorious for his racist vitriol and as a leading proponent of an ethnic style of German nationalism, Treitschke wrote, "The legal bond [within the State] must at the same time be felt to be a natural one, arising automatically out of a blood-relationship either real or

⁸⁸ Ibid, 128.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 129. Treitschke's discussion on this point could be interpreted as a reference to the Prussian led unification of the German state which, throughout his life, he strongly advocated. Whether Treitschke considered Prussia a nation unto itself is unclear. Treitschke's support for a Prussian led German state will be further considered in Chapter three.

imaginary (for on this point nations labour under the most extraordinary delusions).”⁹⁰ That a nation’s sense of its nationality “could be either real or imagined” mattered to Treitschke only as it related to justifying the claims of those who promoted the national principle and in doing so challenged the state’s authority. Treitschke’s argument is that the imaginary nature of nationality renders it invalid as a principle. Therefore, in the ongoing battle between a state’s desire to amalgamate its population into a single entity and “the impulse of every vigorous nationality to create a State of its own,” the desired outcome is that the state should exist as the power over the nationalities, which comprise it.⁹¹ Consequently he concluded, “that there is nothing to be gained from barren talk about the right of nationality.”⁹² Rather, for Treitschke, the importance of nationality was that it represented a perception of an ethnically homogenous society that helped to underpin the “legal bond” between the state and its citizens. That this nationality, in certain instances, was based on either a “real or imaginary” blood relationship mattered less to Treitschke as long as it could be used to strengthen the state’s power, thereby ensuring its will to power. Furthermore, despite its imaginary character, Treitschke views nationality as instrumental in its ability to ferment a society’s sense of national identity, which he refers to as patriotism. For Treitschke, the importance of patriotism was that it helps to facilitate the natural quality of the “legal bond” or ‘unity,’ between citizens.

Treitschke defines “genuine patriotism” as “the consciousness of co-operating with the body-politic, of being rooted in ancestral achievements and of transmitting them

⁹⁰ Ibid, 128.

⁹¹ Ibid, 123.

⁹² Ibid, 129.

to descendents.”⁹³ By this Treitschke means that individuals should “be aware of” or “know” that they are members of a given community. Individuals should be aware that they are not simply living in a particular state but should be conscious of belonging to a particular group.⁹⁴ The implication here (though Treitschke does not use the term ‘nationality’) is that the individual should be aware of his (or her) nationality or national identity and that this awareness constitutes, what Treitschke argues, is patriotism. This sense of identity is formulated through one’s awareness of a common past. Furthermore, Treitschke’s definition of patriotism requires active participation on the part of the individual.

The individual, Treitschke argues, should be active in two ways. First, the individual must be aware of “co-operating with the body-politic” meaning that the individual should perceive of himself (or herself) as not only a member of a community but as involved in a process.⁹⁵ This point can be understood by recalling Treitschke’s demand for the individual’s submission to the state. In this context, Treitschke’s view of patriotism is as one’s awareness of his submission to the state, and his subsequent observance of the state’s authority as a legal and moral power. Second, the individual is patriotic by being aware of his “ancestral achievements” or common past and by instilling this sense of identity in his descendents. The result of one’s patriotism is that it creates a quasi-religious bond between the individual and the state, which Treitschke refers to as “national honour.”⁹⁶ The product of this dynamic, Treitschke states, is that “the high moral ideal of national honour is a factor handed down from one generation to

⁹³ Treitschke, “Politics,” in Guibernau, *Nationalisms*, 10.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 11.

another, enshrining something positively sacred, and compelling the individual to sacrifice himself to it. This ideal is above all price and cannot be reduced to pounds, shilling and pence.”⁹⁷ Thus, for Treitschke “national honour” represents the highest form of patriotism. This is especially so as it ensures that the individual will “sacrifice” himself, in its name, thus submitting to the will of the state. Furthermore, this sense of national honor is transmitted from generation to generation ensuring that the state will continue to exist as superior to the individual, which in Treitschke’s view is necessary in order for the state’s “will to prevail.”⁹⁸ Thus, Treitschke’s view of the state’s relationship to the individual and the individual’s sense of his national identity are both determined by the needs of the state.

Thus, Treitschke’s conception of the state and its relationship to the people or nation, is guided by the state’s needs to preserve and express its power, which was based upon its primary functions as a legal and military authority. In order to achieve this end, the state requires the submission of the individual. This submission was partially predicated on what today would be referred to as a national consciousness. In many respects Treitschke’s conception of the state is based upon his perception of liberty or freedom, which he saw as contingent upon the needs of the state. On this point he said, “One always returns to the same premise that personal liberty cannot be an absolute right, but is limited by the living necessity of the state itself.”⁹⁹ As the following chapters will demonstrate, Treitschke’s belief that the state’s interests are superior to those of the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Treitschke, *Politics*, 14

⁹⁹ Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics*, 210.

individual functions as his guiding rationale in the period of the Franco-Prussian war and is reflective of a more general German historiographical discourse.

Chapter Two: Ernest Renan and the nation-state

“What is a nation?” was a lecture delivered by Renan on 11 March 1882, at the Sorbonne conference of the *Association Scientifique de France*. For Renan, the speech was personally significant as he saw it as the culmination of his views on the structure of the nation and nationality in the modern world. In the preface to *Discours et conférences* (1887), a collection in which the speech was later included, Renan referred to it as the

... part of this volume to which I attach the most importance I have weighed every word with the greatest care. It is my profession of faith in what concerns human things, and, when modern civilization has become engulfed in the wake of these disastrous words: Nation, nationality, race, I hope that someone will remember these twenty pages. I believe them to be completely correct.¹

From the outset of his speech, Renan informs his listeners that his intention is to “analyze” the concept of the nation, “an idea” which, he states, “though seemingly clear lends itself to the most dangerous misunderstandings.”² The problem, as Renan saw it, was that “Nowadays, a far graver mistake is made: race is confused with nation and a sovereignty analogous to that of really existing peoples is attributed to ethnographic or, rather linguistic groups.”³ Renan stated that his intention was to clarify these errors by performing upon the concept of the nation something “akin to a vivisection” in which he would analyze the nation “with an absolutely cool and impartial attitude.”⁴

¹ Paul Edward Corcoran, “The Political Thought of Ernest Renan” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1970), 242.

² Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?” trans, Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

In Renan's view, since the disintegration of Charlemagne's empire, Western Europe has settled into "a kind of equilibrium" as a result of the creation of the modern nation-state.⁵ Western Europe, he states, has progressed into a geo-political reality in which nations such as France, England, Germany and Russia, "will for centuries to come, no matter what may befall them, continue to be individual historical units, the crucial pieces on a chequerboard whose squares will forever vary in importance and size but will never be wholly confused with each other."⁶

This situation, Renan contends, is unique throughout historical experience. Nations, of this character, Renan argues, did not exist in antiquity. "Classical antiquity" Renan states, "had its republics and municipal kingdoms, confederations of local republics and empires, yet, it can hardly be said to have had nations in our understanding of the term."⁷ Therefore, Renan reasons that, "nations, in this sense of the term are something fairly new in history."⁸ More specifically, Renan traces the emergence of European nations to the Germanic invasions, beginning in the fifth century and ending with the final Norman conquests in the tenth century, which, he argues, "introduced into the world the principle which, later, was to serve as the basis for the existence of nationalities."⁹

According to Renan, the Germanic invasions set the framework for the future nations of Europe by imposing their "dynasties, and a military aristocracy upon the more or less extensive parts of the old empire of the west, which assumed the names of their

⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

invaders.”¹⁰ Yet, Renan points out that the Germanic invaders “effected little change in the racial stock” of the newly dominated Western Europe.¹¹ For Renan, the importance of the Germanic invasions was that they established the political and geographical framework from which the modern nation-state took form. Renan argues that the Treaty of Verdun and the subsequent partition of Western Europe “outlined divisions” which were “in principle immutable,” thus setting the course for the forward march of the Western European nation-state.¹² “From then on”, states Renan, “France, Germany, England, Italy and Spain made their way, by often circuitous path and through a thousand and one vicissitudes, to their full national existence, such as we see it blossoming today.”¹³

Thus, for Renan, the Germanic invasions initiated the varied processes by which the modern nation-states of Western Europe came into existence. These states, Renan contends, are defined by “the fusion of their component populations,” which he argues was specific to the nature of the interaction between the conquering Germanic tribes and the native populations they ruled over. To demonstrate his point Renan contrasts the homogeneous character of the Western European states with the fragmented modern “Turkish state,” by which he means the Ottoman Empire. The question Renan poses is why the component populations of the Western European nations are united along

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The partition of Verdun (AD 843) ended a period of civil war within the Frankish empire between the grandsons of Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Emperor. The partition created three new kingdoms. “Two of these,” states Thom, “that of Charles the Bald (843-77), and that of Louis the German (843-76), bear some resemblance, in territorial terms, to modern France and modern Germany. Furthermore, much has been made of the linguistic qualities of the Oaths of Strasbourg sworn by Louis and Charles to each other’s armies, in Old French and Old High German respectively. This has often been regarded as the first text in a Romance language (as distinct from Latin) and, by extension, as the first symbolic appearance of the French (and German) nations.” Martin Thom, “What is a nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (New York: Routledge, 1990) 21.

¹³ Ibid, 10.

national lines whereas the Ottoman state is comprised of “Turks, Slavs, Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Syrians, and Kurds” who are “as distinct today as they were upon the day that they were conquered?”¹⁴ His answer is that the unity of the Western European states, and the disunity of the modern Ottoman state can be explained as a result of two “crucial circumstances,” the first of which was part of the historical development of Western European nations but absent from the development of the Ottoman Empire. First, Renan cites the fact that the “Germanic peoples adopted Christianity as soon as they underwent any prolonged contact with the Greek or Latin peoples.”¹⁵ According to Renan, the fact that many of the conquering Germans were of the same religion or adopted the same religion as those they conquered meant that unlike the “Turkish system” there could be no religious distinction amongst the population. Second, Renan contends that the homogenous character of the Western European states was a result of the conquerors having forgotten their own language.¹⁶ Renan contends that this linguistic “forgetting,” was the result of the intermarriage between the conquerors and the native population. “The crucial result” of these two circumstances, Renan states, “was that, in spite of the extreme violence of the customs of the German invaders, the mould which they imposed became, with the passing centuries, the actual mould of the nation.”¹⁷

“After one or two generations,” Renan states,

the Norman invaders no longer distinguished themselves from the rest of the population, although their influence was not any less profound because of this fact; they had given the conquered country a nobility, military habits, and a patriotism that they had not known before.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 11.

For Renan, the effect of this newfound identity upon his native France was that the population began to see all inhabitants of France as French, thus formulating a French national identity.¹⁹ The reality of the ethnic diversity of France's component population faded into the historical background and was replaced by a belief that the divisions within French society were the result of differences "in courage, customs and educations, all of which were transmitted hereditarily."²⁰ Renan's point was that in the French society of his day "it did not occur to anyone that the origin of all this" —by which he means the creation of the French nation—"was a conquest."²¹ Therefore, Renan concludes that the process of forgetting one's history is essential in the manufacturing of national identity. "The essence of the nation," Renan states, "is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things."²² More specifically, Renan states that,

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for the [the principle of] nationality. Historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial.²³

For Renan, a nation's history and its more often than not violent origins pose a challenge to a nation's view of itself as an ethnically homogenous group of people, who have always existed as such. The historical reality, Renan argues, is that a nation's unity is

¹⁹ Ibid, 10.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 10-11.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 11.

“always effected by means of brutality.”²⁴ Therefore, in Renan’s view, a people’s collective national identity is contingent upon their ability to collectively forget the “means of brutality” by which their nation came to exist.²⁵ In the example of France, Renan states, “No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifale, or a Visigoth, yet every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century.”²⁶ Renan specifically argues this point in order to discredit the idea of those who equate nationality with ethnicity.

Addressing his fellow countrymen, Renan states that it would be impossible to assert that the French nationality is defined by a uniquely French ethnicity. “There are not ten families in France,” contends Renan, “that can supply proof of their Frankish origin, and any such proof would anyways be essentially flawed, as a consequence of countless unknown alliances, which are liable to disrupt any genealogical system.”²⁷ Thus, for Renan, the varied processes by which the nations of Western Europe came into existence make it impossible to consider one’s national identity as representative of any kind of ethnically homogenous lineage. The key source of national identity is in a people’s ability to collectively forget the violent origins, by which their nations came to exist. Renan contends that this collective forgetting has been a crucial component to the political development of the nations of Western Europe and has functioned as the means

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. The massacre of Saint Bartholomew occurred in 1572 in which thousands of (French) Huguenots were killed. This event, Thom states, had “momentous repercussions for the history of France in general, and for the development of political theory in particular.” Martin Thom, “What is a nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, 21.

²⁷ Ibid.

by which the populations of these nations have come to consider themselves as a unified nationality.

Renan's central point is that the modern nation is largely a product of historical circumstances and to an extent contingent upon them. "The modern nation," Renan states, "is a historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts."²⁸ According to Renan what the Germanic invaders brought to Western Europe was kingship, military aristocracies and bounded (and named) territories, not race or language or culture. As Smith, in describing Renan's thesis, states,

While their conversion to Christianity and much linguistic forgetting helped to fuse populations, the dynastic territories re-divided them along political—that is, national—lines. Here we see the primary thrust of Renan's thesis . . . It is a vindication of the political definition of the nation and, secondarily, though in more muted vein, of the historic power of German monarchical government.²⁹

For Renan, the means by which nations became unified, though sometimes different, were historical in character meaning they can be traced to specific historical causes or events each with their own underlying principles. On this point, he states,

Sometimes unity has been effected by a dynasty, as was the case in France; sometimes it has been brought about by the direct will of the provinces, as was the case with Holland, Switzerland, and Belgium; sometimes it has been the work of a general consciousness, belatedly victorious over the caprices of feudalism, as was the case in Italy and Germany. These formations always had a profound *raison d'être*.³⁰

Yet, Renan recognizes that to solely claim that nations are modern and the product of historical processes does not answer the fundamental questions of what it is that constitutes a nation or the concept of nationality. Consequently, Renan asks,

²⁸ Renan, "What is a nation?," 11-12.

²⁹ Smith, *The Nation in History*, 11.

³⁰ Ibid, 12.

But what is a nation? Why is Holland a nation, when Hanover, or the Grand Duchy of Parma, are not? How is it that France continues to be a nation, when the principle which created it has disappeared? How is it that Switzerland, which has three languages, two religions, and three or four races, is a nation, when Tuscany, which is so homogenous, is not one? Why is Austria a state and not a nation? In what ways does the principle of nationality differ from that of races? These are points that a thoughtful person would wish to have settled, in order to put his mind to rest. The affairs of this world can hardly be said to be ruled by reasoning's of this sort, yet diligent men are desirous of bringing some reason into these matters and of unraveling the confusions in which superficial intelligences are entangled.³¹

To address these questions Renan employs an analytical approach in which he considers six factors commonly cited as the basis for the nation and nationality: the dynastic principle, race, language, religion, community of interests and geography. Through his analysis, Renan demonstrates that none of these assumed factors on which nationalities are allegedly based account for how modern European nations have been formed throughout history. Renan argues that for each factor, offered as a criterion to “objectively” define a nation, there exists a historical counterexample that refutes it, meaning that there are existing nations that do not match the proposed criterion.³² Thus, Renan approaches each factor as they relate to a range of ‘case studies’ and abandons each when they prove unproductive as an explanation for what it is that serves as the basis for nationality.³³ His analysis is as follows.

Renan rejects the dynastic principle as a basis for nationality by citing the examples of nations, such as Switzerland and the United States, which achieved nation-

³¹ Ibid. Renan's reference to the principle that created the French nation and then disappeared refers to the French monarchy.

³² Elias Jose Palti, “The Nation as a Problem: Historians and the “National Question,” *History and Theory* 40, no. 3. (October, 2001): 332.

³³ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 35.

hood, yet had “no dynastic basis.”³⁴ Renan admits that the majority of nations were “made by a family of feudal origin” which “contracted a marriage with the soil and which was in some sense a nucleus of centralization.”³⁵ On this point Renan is bound to partially agree or risk contradicting his claim that the modern nations of Western Europe originated with the Germanic invaders, many of whom ruled as kings. Yet, for Renan the examples of Switzerland and the United States render the dynastic principle as unacceptable as an “absolute law” or as an explanation for the basis of nations or nationality.³⁶ Therefore, he states,

It must be admitted that a nation can exist without a dynastic principle, and even for the nations, which have been formed by dynasties can be separated from them without therefore ceasing to exist. The old principle, which only takes account of the right of princes, could no longer be maintained; apart from dynastic right, there is also national right.³⁷

Having dispensed with the dynastic principle, Renan again turns his attention to those who assert that race is the basis for nationality or what Renan calls “national right.” Renan’s criticisms in this case are specifically directed towards the strain of German nationalism predominant at the time, which conflated national right with ethnicity, thereby justifying German territorial expansion. For, Renan the German case is an example of the more general threat ethnographic politics pose to European civilization as a whole.

Several confidently assert that [nationality] is derived from race. The artificial divisions, resulting from feudalism, from princely marriages, from diplomatic congresses are [these authors assert] in a state of decay. It is a population’s race, which remains firm and fixed. This is what

³⁴ Renan, “What is a nation?,” 13.

³⁵ Ibid, 12.

³⁶ Ibid, 13.

³⁷ Ibid.

constitutes a right, a legitimacy. The Germanic family, according to the theory I am expounding here, has the right to reassemble the scattered limbs of the Germanic order over such-and-such a province is stronger than the right of the inhabitants of that province over themselves. There is thus created a kind of primordial right analogous to the divine right of kings; an ethnographic principle is substituted for a national one. This is a very great error, which, if it were to become dominant, would destroy European civilization. The primordial right of races is as narrow and as perilous for genuine progress as the national principle is just and legitimate.³⁸

To counter the ethnographic definition of the nation and nationality, Renan constructs an historical argument that seeks to convince his listeners of the fallacy of such a view of the nation. The history of Western Europe, Renan argues, shows that “ethnographic considerations have played no part in the constitution of modern nations.”³⁹ While race was a unifying factor amongst the tribes and cities of antiquity, Western history, Renan contends, progressed in such a way as to discredit ethnicity as a causal force by which societies became grouped together.

Renan begins his discussion with the onset of the Roman Empire, which, he states, “dealt the gravest of blows to the idea of race” as it was “preserved through common interest” and ruled over a “great agglomeration of cities and provinces wholly different from each-other.”⁴⁰ The rise of Christianity that followed, with its universal and absolute character, aligned itself with the Roman Empire, the result of which, Renan states, “debarred” the “ethnographic argument from the government of human affairs for centuries.”⁴¹ As for the subsequent barbarian invasions, according to Renan, they “had

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

nothing ethnographic about them.”⁴² The shape of their kingdoms was determined by the “whim of the invaders” who were indifferent to the race of their subject populations. Furthermore, the partition of Verdun, which, as already discussed held great importance for Renan as it had set the framework for the modern nation, was fashioned in such a way that it paid no attention to the race of the peoples it divided. Consequently, Renan contends, that the truth of history reveals that

there is no pure race and that to make politics depend upon ethnographic analysis is to surrender to a chimera. The noblest countries, England, France, and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed. Is Germany an exception in this respect? Is it a purely Germanic country? This is a complete illusion. The whole of the south was once Gallic; the whole of the east, from the river Elbe on, is Slav. Even those parts which are claimed to be really pure, are they in fact so? We touch here on one of those problems in regard to which it is of the utmost importance that we equip ourselves with clear ideas and ward off misconceptions.⁴³

The problem, as Renan sees it, is that “philologically-minded historians” have tended to discuss race in much the same way as “physiologically-minded anthropologists” interpret the term, the result of which has been a conflation of race with nationality. Whereas anthropologists view race in zoological terms, meaning, “it serves to indicate real descent, a blood relation,” the study of language and history, Renan states, “does not lead to the same divisions as does physiology.”⁴⁴ Renan’s argument is that the zoological origins of humanity massively predate those of language, culture and civilization. Even “primitive groupings” such as the Aryans and Semites had no “physiological unity.”⁴⁵ Renan does not deny the existence of these groups, as they are,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 14-15.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 15.

he argues, a fact of history in that they lived in a “particular epoch.” Rather, his contention is that by the time these groups existed “the zoological origin of humanity” had already been “lost in impenetrable darkness.”⁴⁶ Therefore, what is known philologically and historically as a nationality is not the same as an anthropological understanding of ethnicity. This is clearly so, Renan argues, when one considers the degree of ethnic diversity that comprises the German, English and French nationalities.

In the case of Germany, Renan states,

What is known philologically and historically as the Germanic race is no doubt a quite distinct family within the human species, but is it a family in the anthropological sense of the term? Certainly not. The emergence of an individual Germanic identity occurred only a few centuries prior to Jesus Christ. One may take it that the Germans did not emerge from the earth at this epoch. Prior to this, mingled with the Slavs in this huge indistinct mass of the Scythians, they did not have their own separate individuality.⁴⁷

Much the same, Renan states, could be said of the English, who are

indeed a type within the whole of humanity. However, the type of what is quite improperly called the Anglo-Saxon race is neither the Briton of Julius Caesar’s time, nor the Anglo-Saxon of Hengist’s time, nor the Dane of Canute’s time, nor the Norman of William the Conqueror’s time; it is rather the result of all these [elements].⁴⁸

As for the French, they are, Renan states,

Neither a Gaul, nor a Frank, nor a Burgundian. Rather, [they are] what has emerged out of the cauldron in which, presided over by the King of France, the most diverse elements have together been simmering. A native of Jersey or Guernsey differs in no way, as far as his origins are concerned, from the Norman population of the opposite coast.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Thus, Renan's point is that racial explanations of nationality clearly do not stand up to the scrutiny of historical analysis. For Renan, the conflation of race with nationality has mostly occurred for political purposes, which pay no attention to the historical reality of the development of the modern nation-state. For Renan, historical investigation conducted in an objective way reveals that the perception of European civilization as composed of a collection of ethnically homogenous nations is clearly not reflective of the modern nation-state.

Race, as we historians understand it, is something which is made and unmade. The study of race is of crucial importance for the scholar concerned with the history of humanity. It has no applications, however, in politics. The instinctive consciousness which presided over the construction of the map of Europe took no account of race, and the leading nations of Europe are of essentially mixed blood.⁵⁰

Throughout his discussion of race as a basis for the nation and nationality, Renan discussed several Western European nations, including his native France. Yet, the primary object of his attention was the German ethnographic style of politics and its self-justifying rationale for the annexation of the formally French province Alsace in 1871. Renan's discussion on race should, thus, be viewed as a general theory on the incompatibility of the notions of race and nationality that sought to counter what he viewed as a specifically Germanic style of ethnic nationalism. This is clearly seen in the following passage, in which Renan warns both his listeners and the Germans themselves of the dangers ethnographic politics may yield.

The fact of race, which was originally crucial, thus becomes increasingly less important. Human history is essentially different from zoology, and race is not everything, as it is among the rodents or the felines, and one does not have the right to go through the world fingering people's skulls,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

and taking them by the throat saying: 'You are of our blood; you belong to us!' Aside from anthropological characteristics, there are such things as reason, justice, the true, and the beautiful, which are the same for all. Be on your guard, for this ethnographic politics is in no way a stable thing and today you use it against others, tomorrow you may see it turned against yourselves. Can you be sure that the Germans, who have raised the banner of ethnography so high, will not see the Slavs in their turn analyze the names of villages in Saxony and Lusatia, search for any traces of the Wiltzes or of the Obotrites, and demand recompense for the massacres and the wholesale enslavements that the Ottoss (sic) inflicted upon their ancestors? It is good for everyone to know how to forget.⁵¹

Thus, for Renan, the danger of ethnographic politics lies in its ability to reawaken the dormant memories of those violent episodes that reside in all national histories. That the ethnic makeup of the modern European nations bears no resemblance to those of their ancestors makes little difference in ethnographic politics, as such a view of the nation does not consider the historical development of Western Europe as it truly occurred. Turning his attention to language, Renan argues that many of the points he made in relation to race can be equally applied to those who assert that language is a basis for nationality.

Language, according to Renan, does function as a unifying force among populations but he argues that it is not a fundamental determinant of nationality.

Language, Renan states,

Invites people to unite, but it does not force them to do so. The United States and England, Latin America and Spain, speak the same languages yet do not form single nations. Conversely, Switzerland, so well made, since she was made with the consent of her differing parts, numbers three or four languages.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid, 15-16.

⁵² Ibid, 16.

For Renan, these examples serve as evidence that a shared language between peoples does not necessitate a drive toward nationhood. Rather, Renan contends, examples such as Switzerland demonstrate that it is a people's will to unify that acts as the catalyst for their national aspirations.⁵³ Yet, much like his discussion on race and nationality, Renan's primary objection is with the way in which language is used as a source for ethnographic politics. On the connection between the two, Renan states,

I was speaking just now of the disadvantages of making international politics depend on ethnography; they would be no less if one were to make it depend upon comparative philology . . . The political importance attaching to languages derives from their being regarded as signs of race. Nothing could be more false. Prussia, where only German is now spoken, spoke Slav a few centuries ago; in Wales, English is spoken; Gaul and Spain speak the primitive dialects of Alba Longa; Egypt speaks Arabic; there are countless other examples one could quote.⁵⁴

Thus, much like the belief that nationality is based upon ethnic homogeneity, Renan argues that a look at the linguistic history of nations reveals that, "A similarity of language did not presuppose similarity of race."⁵⁵ Rather, languages, Renan states, "are historical formations, which tell us very little about the blood of those who speak them and which, in any case, could not shackle human liberty when it is a matter of deciding the family with which one unites oneself for life or for death."⁵⁶

Thus, for Renan, the dangers of viewing language or ethnicity as analogous to nationality are one and the same. Both, Renan argues, put forth a view of mankind,

⁵³ Ibid. "There is something in man" Renan states, "which is superior to language, namely the will." In the case of Switzerland, Renan states "The will of Switzerland to be united, in spite of the diversity of her dialects, is a fact of far greater importance than a similitude often obtained by various vexatious measures."

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 17.

which is ultimately contrary to a view of the individual as belonging to a greater collective humanity that presupposes racial, linguistic and national differences.

The exclusive concern with language, like an excessive preoccupation with race, has its dangers and its drawbacks. Such exaggerations enclose one within a specific culture, considered as national; one limits oneself, one hems oneself in. One leaves the heady air that one breathes in the vast field of humanity in order to enclose oneself in a conventicle with one's compatriots. Nothing could be worse for the mind; nothing could be more disturbing for civilization. Let us not abandon the fundamental principle that man is a reasonable and moral being, before he is cooped up in such and such a language, before he is a member of such and such a race, before he belongs to such and such a culture. Before French, German, or Italian culture there is human culture.⁵⁷

While the bulk of Renan's speech dealt with the subjects of race and language and their relationship to nationality, he does make some points regarding religion, the economy and geography, and how each does not form the basis of the nation.

With regard to religion, Renan argues that, within the settings of the modern nation, religion does not function as a sufficient unifying force that binds together a nationality. Whereas in the ancient past religion took the form of a "state religion" in which each citizen was obligated to pay homage to the official civic religion, much as one would any other common custom, in modern times, Renan states, "there are no longer masses that believe in a perfectly uniform manner."⁵⁸ In modern nations religion, Renan states, "has become an individual matter; it concerns the conscience of each person."⁵⁹ As a result, "each person believes and practices in his own fashion what he is able to and as he wishes."⁶⁰ Therefore, Renan argues, that,

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 17-18.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

There can no longer be a state religion; one can be French, English, German, and be either Catholic, Protestant, or orthodox Jewish, or else practice no cult at all . . . The divisions of nations into Catholics and Protestants no longer exists . . . [As a result,] religion has ceased almost entirely to be one of the elements which serve to define the frontiers of peoples.⁶¹

With regard to the question of the nation as a “community of interest”, by which Renan means that a nation is united by material or economic considerations, Renan states that economic interests alone do not suffice to make a nation. While, economic interests may bring about trade agreements, to view this as the sole criterion for a nation would be to ignore the “sentimental side” of nationality.⁶² Once again referring to the German case, Renan remarks, “A *Zollverein* is not a *patrie*.”⁶³

Regarding geography, Renan recognizes the considerable role natural frontiers play in the division of nations and history in general. Yet, much like his discussion on race and language, Renan argues, that geographical markers, such as rivers and mountains, which serve as the dividing lines between modern nations are contingent upon the whims of history. By this, Renan means that geographic locations are accorded their status as the dividing lines between nations by the varied processes which created these nations, not by their mere existence. On this point Renan poses the following question,

Can one say, however, that as some parties believe, a nation’s frontiers are written on the map and that this nation has the right to judge what is necessary to round off certain contours, in order to reach such and such a mountain and such and such a river, which are thereby accorded a kind of *a priori* limiting faculty? I know of no doctrine, which is more arbitrary or more fatal, for it allows one to justify any or every view of violence.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. *Zollverein* is the German word for customs union. *Patrie* is French for homeland.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

As to the strategic importance of geography as it concerns the frontiers of a nation, Renan recognizes a nation's need to protect its territory. Yet, he argues that the military necessity of preserving a nation's territorial integrity is not unconditional and that to view it as such would result in perpetual warfare. Renan states, "People talk of strategic grounds. Nothing, however, is absolute; it is quite clear that many concessions should be made to necessity. But these concessions should not be taken too far. Otherwise, everybody would lay claim to their military conveniences, and one would have unceasing war."⁶⁵ Therefore, Renan concludes that geography, like race, cannot serve as the basis for the nation, as it fails to account for the spiritual nature that characterizes the modern nation-state.

It is no more soil than it is race, which makes a nation. The soil furnishes the substratum, the field of struggle and of labour; man furnishes the soul. Man is everything in the formation of this sacred thing, which is called a people. Nothing [purely] material suffices for it. A nation is a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the shape of the earth.⁶⁶

Having argued the inadequacy of the dynastic principle, race, language, religion, community of interest and geography as explanations for what constitutes the nation and nationality, Renan drew his own conclusion as to what forms the basis of the nation. "A nation" Renan contends, "is a soul, a spiritual principle."⁶⁷ According to Renan, two things constitute a nation's "soul." The first is "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories."⁶⁸ For Renan, the bonds, which underlie a people's sense of their

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 18-19.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

nationality, can only be provided by “history,” or rather historical memories, which he terms “the cult of the ancestors.”⁶⁹ On this point, Renan states,

The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all the cults, that of the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.⁷⁰

Furthermore, Renan argues that these historical memories must be accompanied by a people’s clearly expressed desire to live a common life. For Renan, this “desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in the undivided form,” represents the second component of a nation’s soul.⁷¹ A national people, Renan contends, are defined by the combination of these two qualities. On this point he states, “To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more—these are the essential conditions for being a people.”⁷²

For Renan, this “fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, of having in the future, [a shared] programme to put into effect,” is far more valuable than “common customs posts” or “frontiers” that conform to some “strategic idea.”⁷³ A shared sense of the past in tandem with a desire to live a common life, Renan states, “are the kinds of things that can be understood in spite of the differences of race and language.”⁷⁴ More specifically, Renan contends that a nation’s sense of shared suffering

⁶⁹ Smith, *The Nation in History*, 11.

⁷⁰ Renan, “What is a nation?” 19.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

is more important than any collective sense of shared joy: "Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort."⁷⁵

All of this brings Renan to his well-known definition of a nation. He states:

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation's existence is, if you will pardon my metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life.⁷⁶

As already mentioned, Renan's definition has often been labeled as 'voluntarist', meaning that it regarded the nation as a free association of individuals each of whom have the right to choose their own nation. In this view Renan's definition is interpreted as being offered as a contrast to the organicism and determinism of the German romantic ideology and its articulation of the nation. Yet, as several authors point out, the seemingly voluntarist quality of Renan's definition has often been overstated.⁷⁷ While Renan's view most certainly stands in contrast to the organic analogy of the nation, Smith persuasively argues that Renan's definition was not offered to "assert a doctrine of voluntary nationality or the individual's right to choose her or his nation."⁷⁸ Rather, Renan's definition, Smith states,

Seeks to vindicate an historical and an activist political understanding of the nation, one that would give due weight to the 'cult of ancestors' and to

⁷⁵ Ibid. On this point Renan may have been referencing France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war in 1871.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Martin Thom, "Tribes within nations: the ancient Germans and the history of modern France" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 23. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 37. Palti, "The Nation as a Problem", 332.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, 37.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

a 'heroic past.' The analogy of the nation with the individual is not intended to support a liberal theory of individual preferences or a situational analysis of group identities. It is used to confirm the role of the past, of history and memory (and forgetting), as well as of continuing political will, in forging nations.⁷⁹

Indeed, Renan's emphasis on the importance of historical memory as a basis for nationality does not infer that a people in becoming a nationality have any choice as to the historical memories they acquire. Rather, these memories are determined by a people's historical development and thus in essence are thrust upon them regardless of individual preference.

Perhaps the tendency of nationalism scholars to characterize Renan's view as voluntaristic is a result of Renan's choice of metaphor, that being the nation as "a daily plebiscite." Thus, the inference is that a people assert their nationality by choice. Yet, to interpret Renan's "daily plebiscite" analogy as such is to ignore the conjoining phrase that follows it in which Renan compares the notion of the nation as a daily plebiscite with the perpetual affirmation of life by the individual.⁸⁰ For Renan, this comparison is meant to highlight the historically constructed nature of the nation. This implies that though a nation's roots may lie in the past, the nation, for Renan, is not merely an emanation of its past.⁸¹ Rather, as Palti observes, Renan's definition and more specifically his daily plebiscite metaphor, infer that the articulation of the nation's past, "requires a subjective meditation, the manifestation of a present will, which, to perpetuate itself, must be continually renewed" (Hence, the plebiscite metaphor in which a people regularly invoke

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Renan, "What is a nation?" 19.

⁸¹ Palti, "The Nation as a Problem: Historians and the 'National Question'" 332.

their historical memories).⁸² Thus, for Renan, just as individuals' wills continue to perpetually affirm their existence, nations whose identities are based upon a shared set of common historical memories will continue to affirm their common destinies, thereby demonstrating their desire to live a common life.⁸³

Interestingly, Renan, despite the spiritual character of his view of the nation, does not see nations as something permanent or enduring throughout history. For Renan, the rise of modern nations, as they constitute a framework by which societies organize themselves, represent a temporary state of affairs, within the greater historical progression of Western Europe. Nations, Renan states, "are not something eternal. They had their beginnings and they will end."⁸⁴ Moreover, Renan posits that the division of Western Europe into independent nations will someday be replaced by a greater "European confederation."⁸⁵ Yet, Renan reflects that for the nineteenth century, history has dictated the rise of the nation, whose existence he considers to be ultimately positive and necessary for European life of that period. "At the present time", Renan contends, "the existence of nations is a good thing, a necessity even. Their existence is the guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master."⁸⁶

Despite their individual shortcomings, the life of nations, Renan argues, is representative of the means by which peoples function as part of a collective humanity. For Renan, this serves as the highest ideal that mankind seeks to attain. Nations, Renan

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Smith, *The Nation in History*, 12.

⁸⁴ Renan, "What is a nation?" 20.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

contends, "through their various and often opposed powers . . . participate in the common work of civilization; each sounds a note in the great concert of humanity, which after all, is the highest ideal reality that we are capable of attaining."⁸⁷ Indeed, the principal message Renan offers his listeners is to believe in a global humanity in which nations are but constituent parts. If viewed in this light, Renan contends, the weaknesses of individual nations become less important than the collective whole, which they comprise.

Isolated, each [nation] has its weak point. I often tell myself that an individual who had those faults, which in nations are taken for good qualities, who fed off vainglory, who was to that degree jealous, egotistical, and quarrelsome, and who would draw his sword on the smallest pretext, would be the most intolerable of men. Yet, all of these discordant details disappear in the overall context.⁸⁸

For Renan, this "overall context" of a world united under the umbrella of humanity, must function as the dominant perspective through which international relations are considered. Renan dedicates the closing remarks of his speech to this very subject and laments what he argues are the anti-empirical politics in vogue in late nineteenth century European political life. In response he calls upon the nations of Western Europe to return to the basic tenets of Enlightenment thought and its belief in a collective humanity guided by reason.

In Renan's view European international relations had become dominated by what he terms the "transcendents of politics."⁸⁹ Renan's use of the term seems to refer to those who, he argues, practise a style of international relations, which disregards empirical reality as a basis from which to make decisions. In many respects, these so-called

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

“transcendants” were the primary object of Renan’s enmity as it is they who, Renan argues, base their political decisions according to a faulty view of the nation and nationality. The result, Renan contends, is that nations involved in territorial disputes have tended to dismiss the wishes of the inhabitants of the given territory under dispute, thereby ignoring the objective reality of the situation. Moreover, Renan outlines one final criterion for nationhood, that being that a nation creates a “moral conscience” and that it proves its right to exist through the sacrifices of its citizens in the name of this moral conscience.

Let me sum up, Gentlemen. Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains. A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates the kind of moral conscience, which we call a nation. So long as this moral consciousness gives us proof of its strength by the sacrifices, which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist. If doubts arise regarding its frontiers, consult the populations in the areas under dispute. They undoubtedly have the right to a say in the matter. This recommendation will bring a smile to the lips of the transcendants of politics, these infallible beings who spend their lives deceiving themselves and who, from the height of their superior principles, take pity upon our mundane concerns. ‘Consult the populations, for heaven’s sake! How naive! A fine example of those wretched French ideas which claim to replace diplomacy and war by childish simple methods.’⁹⁰

While it is safe to assume that Renan’s references to disputed territories is based on the contentious issue of Alsace-Lorraine, his message is not solely limited to this one example. Rather, as in the rest of “What is a nation?” Renan’s intention is to challenge a viewpoint that relates to the nation in general. Thus, for Renan, the problems that plague international relations all rest on philosophy, which he argues, refuses to recognize the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

historical reality of what it is that constitutes a nation. By doing so, those who adhere to either a racial, linguistic or territorial view of the nation and nationality will continue to base their political decisions upon their distorted perception. Renan advises his listeners that the best way to deal with this style of politics is to be patient and wait for the reign of the political transcendents to come to an end, as their rule only represents a temporary state of affairs. Renan predicts that in its wake, people will revert back to more “modest empirical solutions” to international disputes.

Wait a while, Gentlemen; let the reign of the transcendents pass: bear the scorn of the powerful with patience. It may be that, after many fruitless gropings, people will revert to our modest empirical solutions. The best way of being right in the future is, in certain periods to know how to resign oneself to being out of fashion.⁹¹

⁹¹ Ibid, 20-21.

Chapter Three: Treitschke, the Franco-Prussian war and Alsace-Lorraine

The pretext for the Franco-Prussian war concerned the candidacy of a relatively minor Prussian Prince, Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, for the Spanish throne following Isabella II's deposition in 1868. France, fearing an increase in Prussian influence, was strongly opposed to Leopold's candidacy and protested against it. In response to France's objections the Prussian King William I agreed to withdraw the Prussian proposal. Williams's concession in this case represented a diplomatic coup for the French, in particular for the recently appointed French foreign minister, the Duc de Gramont. So humiliated was Otto von Bismarck, then the Prussian Prime Minister and later Chancellor of the German Empire, that he considered tendering his resignation.¹ Yet, despite his initial success Gramont threw away his good fortune by sending his representative back to the Prussian King with a request that William would not renew Leopold's candidature. The King politely but firmly refused Gramont's request and then sent a telegram of the conversation to Bismarck. Bismarck after abbreviating the wording of the exchange in such a way as to make the King's language much curter and the rebuff to the French much sharper than they had in actuality been, sent the exchange, now infamously referred to as the Ems dispatch, to the press.² Following its publication throughout both Germany and France, the appearance of the German leadership's insolence towards their French counterparts outraged both the people and government of France, thus creating an atmosphere between the two countries "in which reason and

¹ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 26.

² Ibid, 27. Craig argues that Bismarck by altering the Ems dispatch did not intend to incite a war with France. According to Craig, Bismarck correctly believed that the French were opposed to war. Yet, the French leadership felt that a retreat from their position would represent an "intolerable loss of honour" and that the Emperor "could not afford the appearance of truckling to Prussia." Ibid, 27.

compromise were impossible.”³ Following the failure of diplomatic negotiations, France, led by Napoleon III, declared war on Prussia and some of the southern states of Germany on 14 July 1870.

The war itself was fierce but short-lived. Throughout the conflict the German forces consistently bested their French counterparts by the speed with which they mobilized, their superior strategy and their formidable artillery. On 1 September 1870 the Battle of Sedan ended in the surrender of Napoleon along with 83, 000 French soldiers, thus bringing an end to France’s Second Empire. Despite the stunning defeat the war continued. On 4 September 1870 the Third Republic was proclaimed which was shortly followed by the siege of Paris, which began in November 1870 and continued into January 1871.

On 18 January 1871, even before the French defeat had been formalized, King William, in an elaborate ceremony in the Galerie des Glaces in Versailles, was hailed as ruler of a united German Reich. Ten days later the French, now led by Adolphe Thiers as acting President of the Republic, accepted the terms of their defeat as embodied in the Treaty of Frankfurt. The treaty cost France the entire province of Alsace, a third of the province of Lorraine, including the cities of Strasbourg and Metz, and an indemnity of five million Francs.⁴

As it exists today, Alsace-Lorraine at the time of the Franco-Prussian war was composed of two parts: The Alsatian section, located in the Rhine valley to the west of the Rhine river and east of the Vosges mountains, and the Lorraine section, which lay in the upper Moselle valley to the north of the Vosges mountains. German claims to the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Coleman Phillipson, *Alsace Lorraine: Past, Present and Future* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd, 1920), 67.

region were based on Germanic elements evident in the Alsatian language and culture, which dated back to German possession of the region during the Holy Roman Empire, although Alsace was separated from the Germanies before the Empire dissolved in 1806.

The French acquisition of Alsace-Lorraine dated back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which the region was acquired in parcels by French kings, who claimed that the territories were rightfully French since the Rhine had been the northern and eastern boundary of Gaul under Roman rule. With the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia placed the region within French domain though German princes in the region remained in possession of their landholdings.

As a result of its French and German heritage Alsace-Lorraine developed into a bilingual community. While most of its educated classes spoke both French and German, the great majority of Alsatians spoke a Germanic dialect. In some areas of the region, such as parts of the Vosges valley, French was the mother tongue of a considerable proportion of the inhabitants and thus, was the predominant language.⁵ As a result of having been formally acquired by the French in the late seventeenth century most of the region's inhabitants had, by the late nineteenth century, developed a sense of belonging to France, as they had participated in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.⁶ Yet, they had also retained aspects of their German heritage and as such developed a sense of their own identity distinct from their French and German rulers. As Coleman Phillipson, observes, native Alsatians and Lorrainers are "neither French nor German in

⁵ Ibid, 38-39.

⁶ Karen Russell Brienza, "Nationalism in France and Germany: An Inquiry Into Conflict Over the Region of Alsace" (M.A.Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1987), 88.

character, temperament, and ideals: they are Alsatians, sharing certain characteristics of the rival nations and differing markedly in other qualities.”⁷

The effect of the war upon French conscience was immense. Indeed, as Robert Gildea states, “The defeat of 1870 probably inflicted more pain on the French nation than any other defeat in its history, even that of 1940.”⁸ For Germany, the Franco-Prussian war ushered it into nationhood. For many Germans the war and Germany’s subsequent unification were representative of Germany’s destiny to become a unified state.

Historically, German claims to Alsace-Lorraine had been based on a variety of grounds ranging from historical considerations and previous ownership, nationality, race and language, to political necessity, security, and the right of conquest.⁹ Treitschke, in the grandiose style that characterizes much of his writing, cites all of these factors in his arguments concerning Germany’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Yet, any attempt to properly understand Treitschke’s arguments concerning Alsace-Lorraine must first consider his view on the Franco-Prussian war and its importance to what he argued was Germany’s destiny.

For Treitschke the war with France was the final act in the long historical process of Germany fulfilling its destiny in becoming a unified state. The war, in Treitschke’s view, “was exactly what we Germans needed” to achieve this end.¹⁰ Thus, Treitschke welcomed the outbreak of war with France as this, he argued, was the necessary catalyst for what he correctly perceived was to be the eventual unification of the German empire.

⁷ Phillipson, *Alsace-Lorraine*, 38.

⁸ Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 119.

⁹ Phillipson, *Alsace-Lorraine*, 112.

¹⁰ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 163.

These events, Treitschke argued, were representative of the divine forces by which the meaning of history revealed itself.

There are great times in which those creative forces of history at which the thinker otherwise barely dares to guess force themselves even upon the most unimaginative mind as a tangible reality . . . Who is so blind that he cannot see in the miraculous events of recent days that divine spirit which forces us Germans to become one nation? In just this way, so crudely and so brazenly, the blow had to be struck against Germany's honor that our moral judgment could not for a moment waver, and just had to strike it if our disunited nation was to be aroused to the realization of its unity.¹¹

Thus, Treitschke's support for, and to a degree the various arguments he makes to justify, the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine are rooted in his belief that Germany's actions throughout the conflict are simply part of its larger destiny towards achieving unification. Consequently, Treitschke's belief in a predestined unified Germany functions as the overarching narrative through which he formulates his arguments for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Yet, within this overarching narrative, Treitschke offers an array of rationales for annexation, ranging from blood ties and historical grounds, to material necessity and the overwhelming strength of the German character.

The majority of Treitschke's arguments are contained in an article he wrote before the war's end in August 1870 entitled "What We Demand From France."¹² At the time in which the article was written the Germans had just defeated the French in the Battle of Gravelotte and the outcome of a German victory seemed likely. Thus, Treitschke wrote the article in response to these events and outlined what, he argued, should be Germany's war aims for what he saw as the inevitable German victory. Foremost in Treitschke's mind was that Germany must insist on the return of Alsace-Lorraine.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "What We Demand From France" was subsequently published in a collection of Treitschke's articles and speeches in the book *Germany, France, Russia & Islam* (London: Jarold & Sons, 1915).

Treitschke believed that the impending German victory would create a more peaceful and secure world and as such it was Germany's duty to make sure this would happen.¹³ Germany, Treitschke contended, was a "peaceful nation" and as such the defeat of France and the creation of a united German Reich would contribute to a greater sense of security amongst the European powers.

When our armies can sweep into the plains of Champagne in a few days' march, when the teeth of the wild beast are broken, and weakened France can no longer venture to attack us . . . the statesmen of the present day, whenever they have realized the altered equilibrium of the Powers, will feel that the strengthening of the boundaries of Germany contributes to the security of the peace of the world. We are a peaceful nation. The traditions of the Hohenzollerns, the constitution of our Army, the long and difficult work before us in the upbuilding of our united German State, forbid the abuse of our warlike power.¹⁴

In Treitschke's view, any future annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany would not represent an abuse of power through war, but rather a righting of the injustices done by the French against Germany through the French seizure of the territories in earlier times. Treitschke's position was not uncommon in German intellectual circles of the day, especially those of the historical profession. As Phillipson observes, the perception of many German historians at the time was that Alsace-Lorraine had been part of the German dominions until France had gotten possession of it "by force or fraud."¹⁵ In this light, German calls for annexation "amounted to no more than the vindication of an old inalienable right. Accordingly the Germans long held that the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine would be a mere restoration—a *Zurückeroberung* (a recapture) as

¹³ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 163.

¹⁴ Heinrich von Treitschke, "What We Demand From France." in *Germany, France, Russia & Islam*, 104.

¹⁵ Phillipson, *Alsace-Lorraine*, 113.

distinguished from an *Eroberung* (a conquest).¹⁶ As already stated, this position was common amongst much of the German historical establishment and thus reflective of historians of many political persuasions.

For example, following Napoleon's capture at Sedan in the autumn of 1870, the eminent German historian Leopold von Ranke addressed the following remark to Adolphe Thiers stating, "It is against Louis XIV that we now have to wage war."¹⁷ Ranke's remark was a reference to the French acts of aggression in the seventeenth century, which wrested the provinces from a disunited Germany. In his view it was incumbent upon Germany to undo that act.¹⁸ Similarly, also in 1870, the more liberal minded German historian, Theodor Mommsen, speaking of Germany's war aims in a series of letters addressed to the people of Italy and published in Milanese papers, wrote, "We ask something more than money. We claim territory; not French territory, but German . . . Melancholy is the tale of our neighbors appropriating Lorraine first, then Alsace . . . The feeble policy of our forefathers betrayed our land, our faith, and our language."¹⁹ In Mommsen's view, a German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was a question of restoration and not of conquest. On this point he stated, "Let France keep her French territory intact, whether always hers or not we will not ask. We desire no conquests; we want what is our own, neither more nor less."²⁰

Like Ranke and Mommsen, Treitschke also argued that Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was justified on historical grounds though his remarks on the subject

¹⁶ Ibid, 113.

¹⁷ Phillipson, *Alsace-Lorraine*, 114.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

carried a more belligerent tone. The war in Treitschke's view had united Germany into a nation-state and as such had awakened the once dormant desires of its people to demand what was rightfully theirs: the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. Treitschke makes this point clear in his opening remarks in "What We Demand From France" stating, "The thought, however, which after first knocking timidly at our doors as a shamefaced wish, has in four swift weeks, grown to be the mighty war-cry of the nation, is no other than this: "Restore what you stole from us long ago; give back Alsace and Lorraine."²¹

Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, Treitschke contends, is justified on historical grounds and as such represents "an undoing today of the crimes which France perpetrated on our western lands two hundred years ago."²² It is important to remember that Treitschke's arguments are designed not only to justify the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine but also to convince his readers of the necessity of annexation. For example, with regard to what he terms the "political-economical" value the inclusion of these provinces into the greater German Reich would yield, Treitschke states the following.

Our sober judgment cannot refuse to admit that nature has dealt with our country much more like a stepmother than a mother. The singularly barren outline of our shore coastline on the North Sea, and the course of most of our German rivers and hillsides, are just as unfavorable to political unity as they are to commerce. Only a few strips of our German soil can compare in natural fertility with wealthy Normandy, the luxurious plains of England, and the teeming cornfields of the interior of Russia. But here, in Alsace, there is a real German district, the soil of which, under favoring skies, is rich with blessings which as only a very few spots in the Upper Rhenish Palatinate and the mountain country of Baden enjoy. The unusual configuration of the country has made it possible to pierce canals through gaps in the mountains—magnificent waterways, from the Rhine to the basin of the Rhone and the Seine—such as German ground scarcely ever admits.

²¹ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 99.

²² Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 169.

We are by no means rich enough to be able to renounce so precious a possession.²³

Thus, in Treitschke's view, Germany as it existed in 1870, was lacking in a geography which lent itself to commercial growth and political unity. For Treitschke, the significance of Alsace-Lorraine is that its inclusion into the German Reich would enhance German unity through the particulars of its geographical formations, thereby stimulating a more unified German state. Furthermore, Treitschke's language in this passage is indicative of how his arguments are predicated upon his belief that Alsace and Lorraine, despite being under French rule in 1870, were in fact German territories. For example, in the previous passage's last line, in which Treitschke states that Germany cannot afford to "renounce so precious a possession" as Alsace-Lorraine, the implication is that a refusal on Germany's part to annex these provinces would be akin to disowning them. Thus, Treitschke's claim to the provinces was not solely limited to its political or commercial value but was rather based on his deep belief that Alsace and Lorraine was "German land."²⁴ As such, these provinces, Treitschke states, are "ours by nature and history."²⁵

Treitschke's contention that Alsace and Lorraine were German territories was based on his view that they were German in character. Much of his discussion in "What We Demand From France" is focused on demonstrating this point. In Treitschke's view the German character of Alsace and Lorraine resided in both its geography and its culture. To convey this point Treitschke leads his readers on an imaginary journey

²³ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 112-113.

²⁴ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 122.

²⁵ Ibid.

through the provinces thus hoping to appeal to their historic-romantic sensibilities.²⁶ As Treitschke describes it, Alsace-Lorraine is:

A glorious panorama of German scenery! This thought has most assuredly suggested itself to everyone who has stood, in the freshness of morning, when the shreds of mists still cling to the rocky summits upon the walls of Schlettstadt. High up on the mountains tower the dark pine-forests, which are hardly known in the woodless Gaulish country; lower down, those bright chestnut woods, which no man who has once made the Rhine his home can bear to miss; on the slopes, the gardens of the vines; and down below, that undulating, odorous plain, the mere recollection of which charmed from Goethe in his old age glowing words of praise for his "glorious Alsace."²⁷

Along with the natural beauty and German history of the region, Treitschke goes so far as to contend, "Nature herself meant that the plain of the Upper Rhine should have a common destiny."²⁸ This point, Treitschke contends, is apparent in the mountain walls of the provinces, which are of the "same formation" as their German counterpart.²⁹

Many of Treitschke's assertions of Alsace's German character are based on the fact that unlike its educated classes its peasants had retained their German language as well as old German customs and clothes. While in his earlier as well as later works, Treitschke claims that the character of a people is determined by the character of its upper classes, in "What We Demand From France" he extols the virtues of a national peasant culture and its importance for the national life of a state.³⁰ On this point he states,

Our new State owes its strength to the national idea. Its intention is to be an honest neighbor to every foreign nationality, a grasping adversary to

²⁶ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 166.

²⁷ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 123-124.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 171-172.

none; and for this reason it finds its western frontier indicated to it by the language and manners and life of the rural population. Every State is kept fresh and young from below. New forces never cease to arise out of the healthy depths of the peasant class, while the population of the towns swiftly changes, and the families of the upper classes either fall away or are carried off into other habitations. We Germans still continue to make this experience in the colonies of our Eastern frontier. Wherever we have succeeded in Germanising the peasant, our national life stands erect; wherever he has remained non-German, German ways of life wage to this day a struggle for their existence.³¹

Thus, for Treitschke it is the German peasant who both embodies the hope of a national future as well as defines the national boundaries between Germany and its neighbors. The importance of this point for Alsace-Lorraine, Treitschke contends, is that it reveals that the true division or border between France and Germany lies only westward in Lorraine where there is no German spoken and the customs and style are of a distinctly French nature. As Treitschke describes it:

Applying this standard [of a rural population as an indicator of national boundaries], we shall find German and French nationality separated by a line, which may be roughly described as leading along the ridge of the Vosges to the source of the Saar, and thence to the north-west towards Diedenhofen and Longwy. What lies beyond is Gaulish. This boundary-line, hard to be perceived in the hilly districts of Lorraine, is drawn with mathematical precision at several points of the Wasgau hills. Wandering westward from the busy little town of Wesserling in Upper Alsace, one first ascends through leafy woods, enjoying the view into the smiling valley of the Thur, and reaching at Urbes the river boundary, the frontier of the *departement* of the Upper Rhine. There the road leads through a long tunnel, and the moment the traveler passes out of the dark into the *departement* of the Vosges, he sees that the country and its inhabitants have undergone a complete change. The woods of Germany have vanished, and naked hills surround the valley of the infant Moselle. True, it is possible to guess, from the aspect of the tall peasants, from whom the French army draws so many fine-looking Cuirassiers, that many a drop of Germanic blood may flow in the veins of the population; but down at Boussang no word of German is spoken. The poorer fashion in which the

³¹ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 117-118.

houses are built, the wooden shoes, and the cotton nightcap, at once betray French civilization.³²

Treitschke's point is that Alsace and parts of Lorraine are clearly German territories. His description of the French character of Lorraine is meant to demonstrate this fact by contrasting the French qualities of this section of Lorraine with its more German-like Alsatian neighbors. That these provinces are German in character, Treitschke argues, is apparent through the abundance of German culture in the region. For example "Alsace," Treitschke states, "has always maintained an honorable place in the earlier history of German Art."³³ The same, Treitschke argues, can be said of German literature, as "nearly all the noteworthy humorists of our earlier literature were native of Alsace, or, at all events, socially connected with the district."³⁴ Indeed, "Everywhere in the gay little land," writes Treitschke, "there was German laughter, German humor, and lust of life."³⁵ Thus, for Treitschke the history of Alsace and Lorraine's German past is indicative of its eternal German character. Faced with this evidence Treitschke asks his readers: "Are we to believe that that rich millennium of German history has been utterly destroyed by two centuries of French dominion?"³⁶

Whereas much of Treitschke's arguments concerning German claims to Alsace-Lorraine rested on the cultural, linguistic and geographic affinities of the region with what he perceived to be a German character, most of his argument is founded upon his

³² Ibid, 118-119.

³³ Ibid, 125.

³⁴ Ibid, 125-126.

³⁵ Ibid, 124-125.

³⁶ Ibid, 129.

assertion that the people of Alsace are ethnically German and as such their inclusion into the German state is both justified and inevitable. On this point he states the following.

The people of Alsace are already beginning to doubt the invincibility of their nation, and at all events to divine the mighty growth of the German Empire. Perverse obstinacy, and a thousand French intrigues creeping in the dark, will make every step on the newly conquered soil difficult for us: but our ultimate success is certain, for on our side fights what is stronger than the lying artifices of the stranger—nature herself and the voice of common blood.³⁷

For Treitschke, the power of a “common blood” rendered the Alsatians own political preferences powerless in the face of Germany’s destiny in becoming a unified State. Essentially, Treitschke’s argument framed German claims to Alsace-Lorraine as the corollary of immutable historical and traditional forces, thereby appropriating the older romantic concept of the *Volk*.³⁸

Crudely translated the term “Volk” in German means people, yet its implication is much stronger than its literal translation. As George Mosse, a leading historian on volkish thought, describes it,

“Volk” is one of those perplexing German terms, which connotes far more than its specific meaning. “Volk” is a much more comprehensive term than “people” for to German thinkers ever since the birth of German romanticism in the late 18th century “Volk” signified the union of a group of people with a transcendental “essence”. This “essence” might be called “nature” or “cosmos” or “mythos,” but in each instance it was fused to man’s innermost nature, and represented the source of his creativity, his depth of feeling, his individuality, and his unity with other members of the “Volk.”³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, 157.

³⁸ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 169.

³⁹ George Mosse, *The Crisis of the German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 4.

The concept of the Volk has, since its inception in the 18th century, largely focused on enhancing the unity of its members. Thus, despite its mystical pretensions, the Volk concept has often been appropriated for the practical political purpose of German unity. As Mosse describes it, volkish thought sought a spiritual Germanic revolution in which the unity of the German people would be realized.⁴⁰

The Volk concept primarily identified the German people by their racial and cultural affinities. As such the German people were held to have a close association with the soil, and exist as a community of shared language and common traditions.⁴¹ Furthermore, volkish thought posited an organicist understanding of the nation which was contrary to the Western conception of the nation. As Dorpalen states, the Volk concept of a nation “does not derive its inspiration from an idea, from a fundamental agreement on basic values of law and morality; it envisages Germans as a natural organism, a primordial, elemental force.”⁴² In this light, one’s German identity is “indestructible and un-perishable.”⁴³

Treitschke’s adoption of the Volk concept to support the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was never very explicit. Throughout his writings on the subject of annexation he never cited the term “Volk” directly. Yet, the concept of the Volk is evident throughout his arguments. All of his references to the German character of Alsace and Lorraine, whether based on its geography, art, literature, language, and ethnicity all reflect the Volkish belief that these provinces, despite their more recent history as French, retained their mystical German essence and as such were German in spirit. In

⁴⁰ Ibid, 259.

⁴¹ Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke*, 169.

⁴² Ibid, 169-170.

⁴³ Ibid, 169.

Treitschke's view, Dorpalen states, the Alsatians are in Fichte's words, *Urvolk*.⁴⁴ They are continually "drawing strength from within [themselves] and forever remaining the same, untouched by the shifting political boundaries and by professions of allegiance to other 'peoples.'"⁴⁵ On this point Treitschke states,

What is it, speaking generally, that is healthy and energetic in Alsace? What is it that elevates these districts above the dark mists of self-indulgence and priestly obscurantism, which overhang most of the remaining provinces of France? The German nature of Alsace, and the ineradicable impulse towards self-government, which even the artifices of Napoleonic prefects could not wholly banish, and which refused to bow its head before the monarchical socialism of the Second Empire, are German.⁴⁶

Interestingly, in his earlier work Treitschke had objected to the Volk concept as both "petty and parochial."⁴⁷ His concern was more with the power of the state and less with the people that occupied it. Yet, the appeal of the Volk concept, with its emphasis on the primordial and unchanging character of all Germans, proved highly useful for Treitschke as it allowed him to call upon "new political vistas" from which he could base his demands for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.⁴⁸ As Dorpalen states, by adopting the Volk concept, Treitschke, could now make the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine appear "as part of a sacred mission to restore all Germans to Germany."⁴⁹ On this point Treitschke states the following:

In view of our obligation to secure the peace of the world, who will venture to object that the people of Alsace and Lorraine do not want to

⁴⁴ *Urvolk* roughly translated means "first people." Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) was a German philosopher whose views were highly influential on German nationalism. Treitschke's relationship to Fichte will be further examined in chapter Five.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 170.

⁴⁶ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 140-150.

⁴⁷ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 171.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

belong to us? The doctrine of the right of all branches of the German race to decide on their own destinies, the plausible solution of demagogues without a fatherland, shiver to pieces in the presence of the sacred necessity of these great days. These territories are ours by the right of the sword, and we shall dispose of them in virtue of a higher right—the right of the German nation, which will not permit its lost children to remain strangers to the German Empire.⁵⁰

Thus, in Treitschke's view, the creation of a unified German nation-state, as sanctioned by the divine forces which underlay history, demanded that all those designated as "German" be integrated into the German Empire. Consequently, this context, Treitschke argues, renders the personal wishes or "the will" of the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine invalid in the face of the "moral" and "divine" forces guiding the events of the day.

We Germans, who know Germany and France, know better than these unfortunates themselves what is good for the people of Alsace, who have remained under the misleading influence of their French connection outside the sympathies of new Germany. Against their will we shall restore them to their true selves. We have seen with joyful wonder the undying power of the moral forces of history, manifested far too frequently in the immense changes of these days, to place much confidence in the value of a mere popular disinclination.⁵¹

The above passage demonstrates Treitschke's awareness that many an Alsatian and Lorrainer at the time were opposed to the prospect of an annexation into the German empire. As such they would likely be opposed to Treitschke's assertion that they were German and as such should be forcibly annexed into a greater a German Reich.⁵²

⁵⁰ Treitschke, "What We Demand From France," 105.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² During this time the Alsatian's displeasure with the prospect of forced cession of the provinces from France to Germany was expressed by the region's representatives in the French National Assembly, both before and after the transfer was finalized. Public sentiment at the time is also reflected in the mass emigration, between 1871-1872, of 500,000 of the 1,600,000 Alsacians and Lorrainers who registered for the option to emigrate to France in order to retain their French citizenship. A. Wahl, "*L'Option et L'Emigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains (1871-1872)*", in "Nationalism in France and Germany: An Inquiry

Thus, Treitschke's argument that the will of the Alsatians is inconsequential is a way of reconciling this reality with his position. In Treitschke's view the Alsatians' sense of their German character had become corrupted as a result of French influence and rule. Their annexation into the German empire would represent not only a restoration of "lost children" back to their motherland but also a restoration of the Alsatians' sense of their true German Volk. By appealing to the eternal and unchanging character of the German identity Treitschke could justify the annexation of the people of Alsace-Lorraine against their will. For Treitschke, this combination of Germany's drive to nationhood, national honor and a recognition of Alsace's German history and character demanded that the inhabitants of Alsace be reincorporated back into the German Empire despite any opposition on their part.

The spirit of a nation lays hold, not only of the generations, which live beside it, but of those which are before it and behind it. We appeal from the mistaken wishes of the men who are there today to the wishes of those who were there before them. We appeal to all those strong German men who once stamped the seal of our German nature on the language and manners, the art and the social life, of the Upper Rhine. Before the nineteenth century closes the world will recognize that the spirits of Erwin von Steinbach and Sebastian Brandt are still alive, and that we were only obeying the dictates of national honor when we made little account of the preferences of the people who live in Alsace today.⁵³

For Treitschke, the issue of Alsace-Lorraine was inextricably bound to that of German unification. In many respects Treitschke, in his demand for the annexation of the provinces, portrays himself and others of like mind, as similar to doctors treating a sick

Into Conflict Over the Region of Alsace," Karen Russell Brienza (M.A. Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1987), 105.

⁵³ Ibid, 105-106. Erwin von Steinbach (c. 1244-1381), was the builder of the Strasbourg cathedral; Sebastian Brandt (1457-1521), was a didactic poet and satirist.

patient (Alsace), who not knowing what is best for itself, is forced to take medicine it might not want but requires.

All our hope rests on the re-awakening of the free German spirit. When once the mother-tongue is taught, purely and honestly—when the Evangelical Church can again move about in undisturbed liberty—when an intelligent German provincial Press brings back the country to the knowledge of German life—the cure of its sickness will have begun.⁵⁴

In Treitschke's view, despite their present opposition to annexation, the Alsatians in time would come to feel differently and would embrace their restored sense of German identity. This reality was dictated by nature itself as manifested in the individuals' sense of their own ethnic and hence national identity.

I tell you that the instinct of nature and the call of the blood will speak in Alsace, the call of the blood, which has already brought so many lost sons of our great Fatherland to our Empire. I tell you the day will come when, in the most distant villages of the Vosges, the German peasant will say, "It is a happiness and an honor to be a citizen of the German Empire."⁵⁵

One consequence of Treitschke's demand for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, according to the German character of its people, was that it revealed an inherent inconsistency within his argument. As Dorpalen points out, if the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine represented a sacred mission to restore all Germans to Germany then, "such a mission must likewise apply to Germans in Austria, Russia, Switzerland, or the Netherlands; by making the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine a matter of political principle the door was thrown open to many another territorial demand."⁵⁶ In spite of this, Treitschke rejected the idea that it was the task of German statecraft to force all those

⁵⁴ Ibid, 174.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 197.

⁵⁶ Dorpalen, *Treitschke*, 171.

designated as German in character back into the greater Reich.⁵⁷ Yet, Treitschke's writings concerning Alsace-Lorraine ultimately contradict his position as they are littered with arguments which could lend themselves to territorial claims on any country with a German descended population. Dorpalen explains this contradiction in Treitschke's thought as a result of,

his ingrained tendency of "idealistically" raising practical considerations to matters of general principle. By endowing them with the halo of an imperishable *Volkstum* [Treitschke] appeared to give them a validity far beyond their original range. This range extended even further by his readiness to seize upon any argument at hand which would serve his ends.⁵⁸

Thus, this apparent inconsistency is indicative of Treitschke's long-standing habit of discarding "for the argument of the moment long-held views and prejudices which might weaken his case."⁵⁹

Despite his intellectual dishonesty, Treitschke's arguments concerning the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine are mostly consistent with his conception of the state. His contention that the preferences of the Alsatians and Lorrainers are inconsequential in the face of the divinely sanctioned process, by which the German state was achieving unification, is consistent with his belief in the overwhelming superiority of the state over the individual. Treitschke's call for the subjugation of the Alsatians and Lorrainers to the needs of the German empire is the application of his maxim in *Politics* that the individual is subservient to the authority of the state as a legal, moral and military power. Indeed, as Dorpalen states, "the one element of stability in [Treitschke's] intellectual tergiversation

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

was his unshakable, religious conviction of the need for a great and strong German state.”⁶⁰ Thus, Treitschke’s response to the Franco-Prussian war and his demand for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine were largely determined by “his state-centered perspective, which refused to acknowledge the validity of any supranational values.”⁶¹ In Treitschke’s view there could be no law superseding the needs of the Prusso-German state. By making the state to be the “ultimate source of all moral energies,” Treitschke, Dorpalen writes, “had to deny the existence of any moral ties transcending state boundaries.”⁶² Treitschke’s denial of a standard of universal values applicable to humanity in its entirety is rooted in the tradition of German philosophy of history known as historicism. As such, following an examination of Renan’s writings in the Franco-Prussian war, the discussion will examine the fundamental tenets of historicism and its historical progression up to and during the time of Treitschke. In doing so it will demonstrate how German historicist thought functioned as the intellectual foundation for Treitschke’s view of the state and nationalism.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 173.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Chapter Four: Renan, the Franco-Prussian war and Alsace-Lorraine

Like Treitschke, Renan wrote extensively during the period of the Franco-Prussian war and in the period immediately following it. Many of his criticisms on German claims to Alsace-Lorraine are to be found in his correspondence and complete works that were inspired by, what for Renan, were the disastrous events of the day. The following analysis of Renan's writing from this period reveals that these events, specifically Germany's claims over and eventual annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, acted as the catalyst for his discussion on nationality. Indeed, within Renan's writings from this period one can discern the germs of the arguments he would develop, twelve years after the war's end, in *What is a nation?*.

The effect of the outbreak of hostilities between France and Prussia upon Renan was immense. Since the crisis of faith that dominated his youth—in which Renan had rejected the life of the priesthood—he had throughout his life turned to German philosophy and literature as a source of inspiration. In his own words, "Germany was my mistress."¹

Renan first discovered German philosophy as a young student. For Renan, the philosophy of men such as Goethe, Kant and Herder represented the very antithesis of the scholasticism that had been forced upon him during his seminary years.² Describing his attraction to the great minds of German philosophical thought, Renan writes of "a secret instinct, a love without acquaintance that bears me toward Germany to see if I may there

¹ Martha E. Bernstein, "Intellectual Reactions to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Ernest Renan and Emile Zola: Traitors or Patriots?" (M.A. Thesis., Concordia University, 1993), 28.

² Ibid, 23.

find my form.”³ Renan’s attraction to Germany lay in what he saw as its respect for learning, its emphasis on scientific progress, the religious character of its free-thought, and in general the seriousness of its people. For Renan, the quality of French intellectual thought revealed itself as superficial in comparison to the giants of German philosophy. His contempt for the ideas of French writers, such as Saint-Marc Girardin, whom he referred to as an “imbecile” and “the most nauseating creature I know”, is indicative of both the frustration he felt towards French writing and his attraction to German philosophy.⁴ Indeed, referring to those of his contemporaries whose ideas he rejected in favor of German philosophy, he stated, “I rage against them all. Germany! Germany! Germany! Goethe, Herder, Kant.”⁵ In his own work Renan routinely turned to those aspects of German thought which he could assimilate to his own needs.⁶ Thus, long before 1870, Renan’s Germanism was a strong influence upon his intellectual thought. His admiration for German thought and culture largely influenced his reaction to the events of the war and in turn incited a personal crisis in which Renan was forced to reconcile his love for German culture with the invading power destroying his homeland.

For Renan, the war between France and Germany was particularly devastating, as he had always envisioned the two countries as united in an intellectual, moral and political union working together for the common good of humanity. The outbreak of war put an end to this idealistic dream. In his biography of Renan, H.W. Wardman equates Renan’s state of mind at this time to the crisis of faith he experienced as a young man and describes the effect of the war upon Renan as the following.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. Saint Marc-Girardin refers to Marc Girardin (1801-1873), a French politician and man of letters.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Richard M. Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1968), 94-95.

It is in fact no exaggeration to say that for him the war brought a crisis as serious as his crisis of faith. Once again the world lay in ruins. This one was his vision of France and Prussia working together in accordance with the ideals of scholars and intellectuals. German culture had been his mainstay during his crisis of faith. It did not lose its value in his eyes because of the war. But he needed to believe that devotion to scholarship made a difference to the world and the war made him realize that it had not. He wanted to believe that the world was a place in which idealists triumph. The war showed him that the world was not like that and he never fully recovered from the shock.⁷

A good example of Renan's deep sense of disappointment with the war can be discerned from a letter he sent to his Swiss friend, Charles Ritter, in September 1871.⁸ By this point the French forces had been soundly defeated and Germany had formally acquired the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine as stipulated in the Treaty of Frankfurt. Prussian forces had wreaked havoc throughout France, in particular during the three-month siege of Paris, and continued to occupy many parts of the country. Furthermore, following the French elections to the National Assembly the previous February, Paris was on the verge of civil war as the newly installed Third Republic attempted to repress the Commune government that would shortly come to take complete control of the French capital.⁹ Reflecting on these events Renan's letter carries a despondent tone as he detailed what he believed was to be the war's dire outcome.

I am writing at this moment several reflections on the present situation; these are probably the last pages of politics that I will ever write. All that I have dreamed, desired, and preached turn out to be chimerical. I had

⁷ H.W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography* (London: The Athlone Press, 1964), 113. Wardman writes that Renan's achievement in adapting German thought to the French mind, in popularizing it, is comparable to that of Voltaire a century earlier, in relation to English thought.

⁸ Charles Ritter (1838-1908) was a Swiss theologian and writer who translated the work of German philologist David Strauss.

⁹ Indeed, seven days after Renan wrote his letter to Ritter the Paris Commune took effect. The Paris Commune refers to the period from 18 March 1871 until 28 May 1871 in which the Republic fought the Commune government—a coalition of Red Republican national-guard organizations—that had taken control of Paris. During this period 12,000 insurgent communards alone perished.

made it my goal in life to work for the intellectual, moral, and political union of Germany and France. But there was the criminal folly of the overthrown government [the Second Empire], the patriotic excesses of the Germans, and the Prussian pride which have marked out between France and Germany an abyss that will not be closed up for centuries.¹⁰

Thus, Renan's admiration for German culture and his hope for a joint Franco-German unity, forced him to confront the reality of the war's outcome thereby inciting a personal internal struggle within him. Of particular significance for Renan were the issues of Alsace-Lorraine and the forced annexation of the regions' inhabitants into the German Empire. Describing the inner conflict he was experiencing, he wrote,

I am not able to gainsay what I have said in full conscience and counsel hate when I have counseled love. I must say with Goethe: "How would you have me preach hate when I do not feel it in my heart?" I am not able, however, to say to my compatriots, when two million Frenchmen [in Alsace and Lorraine] ask their countrymen to restore them to France, not to listen to them. I will be silent.¹¹

Thus, even in the face of what for Renan was Germany's gravest transgression, the forced annexation of his fellow countrymen in Alsace-Lorraine, he could not deny his original mistress that was German culture. Renan's vow to remain silent was his attempt to convey his feeling that he could not preach a hatred of Germany he did not feel, nor could he overlook the injustice being perpetrated against the wills of those Alsatians and Lorrainers who wished to remain Frenchmen. Yet, as stated earlier, Renan's vow of silence in this passage was only offered in the war's dying days and after he had written a considerable amount during a period in which the conflict was still very much active.

¹⁰ Ernest Renan, to Charles Ritter, 11 March 1871, in Paul Corcoran, "The Political Thought of Ernest Renan" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), 211.

¹¹ Ibid.

Renan's first formal publication during the war was an article entitled 'La Guerre entre la France et l'Allemagne' which was published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* on 15 September 1870. While the article was published following the French defeat at Sedan, it is believed that Renan wrote the piece before the decisive battle.¹² This point may explain how in the article Renan remained optimistic about the possibility of a future reconciliation between the two countries, despite the ongoing hostilities between Germany and his native France. Contrary to the vitriolic and often belligerent patriotic sentiment flowing out of both countries at this time, Renan's article was "liberal, internationalist and sane."¹³ In it Renan argued that France was the aggressor in the war and that if Prussia were treated more liberally, it would respond by being less aggressive. Prussia, Renan argued, must also show moderation by giving up its claim to Alsace-Lorraine thereby restoring the balance of power between the two countries. Moreover, Renan advised that a league of neutrals should intervene and act as arbitrator between the two countries, thereby ending the conflict and bringing a just peace.¹⁴ The war, Renan argued, had broken the "intellectual, moral and political harmony" that existed between France and Germany. Yet, this break, Renan believed, was not irrevocable. Perhaps, Renan's choice of parable best illustrates his belief that despite the enmity between the two warring nations they would, in the future, still be united by a common nature.

I have read, I do not remember where, the parable of two brothers who, no doubt in the time of Cain and Abel, came to hate each other, and resolved to battle each other to the point that they would no longer be brothers. When, exhausted, they fell together on the ground, they found they were

¹² Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 117. The Battle of Sedan occurred on 3 September 1870.

¹³ *Ibid*, 117.

¹⁴ Renan's rather prescient proposal anticipated French President Adolphe Thiers' visit to European capitals later in the war with a view to persuading the neutrals to intervene. *Ibid*, 117.

still brothers, neighbors, tributaries from the same well, dwellers along the same stream.¹⁵

About this same time Renan began what would become a lengthy and public exchange with David Friedrich Strauss, then Germany's foremost philologist and biblical scholar. Renan had for some time admired Strauss and had already agreed to write the preface for Strauss's new book on Voltaire that was to be published in France.¹⁶ The correspondence between the two men started through a congratulatory letter Renan had sent Strauss following the book's publication at the end of July 1870. Renan saw the letter as an opportunity to express his dismay over the outbreak of hostilities between the two men's native countries. On 18 August 1870, Strauss replied to Renan by publishing an open letter in the *Gazette d'Augsbourg* suggesting that the two men take part in a frank and dispassionate discussion about the causes and significance of the war.¹⁷ Despite the inviting tone of his letter, Strauss's view of the conflict was both biased and nationalistic. In Strauss' opinion the war could not have been avoided. Furthermore, he believed that the Prussian victories represented a "just punishment for French arrogance and proof of the vitality of Prussian culture as compared with the decadence of the French."¹⁸ Despite Strauss's partisan view of the war Renan remained positive by this seeming opportunity for a French and German scholar to consider the conflict between their two countries from a "philosophical point of view."¹⁹ Renan subsequently had Strauss's letter

¹⁵ Renan, "Guerre", in Corcoran, 212.

¹⁶ In a letter to Charles Ritter, Strauss's French translator, Renan described Strauss, as "the man of this century for whom I have the greatest admiration and sympathy." "Ernest Renan, to Charles Ritter, 3 September 1869," in Bernstein, "Intellectual Reactions," 42.

¹⁷ Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 117.

¹⁸ Ibid, 117-118.

¹⁹ Ibid, 118.

translated and published in the *Debats* on 15 September 1870.²⁰ Following this Renan wrote his own reply to Strauss, which was published in the same journal on the sixteenth. Renan's letter was respectful in tone—he addressed Strauss as a “learned master”—assuming that Strauss would follow his example and publish his letter in a German paper, so that “the voice of reason urging moderation on the [German] militarists would make itself heard.”²¹ Much like his letter in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Renan argued for Germany's moderation toward France while still recognizing the need for its unification. Moreover, Renan repeated his call for the return of Alsace-Lorraine as this, he wrote, was necessary “to the harmony of the world.”²² Renan's reasoning on this point was that the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine would dismember France to a degree in which it would no longer be able to provide its necessary influence to maintain a European balance of power. Thus, Renan urged Strauss to view the conflict philosophically writing that: “If success absolves everything, the Prussian government is entirely absolved; but we are philosophers; we are naïve enough to believe that he who succeeds may be partly to blame.”²³ Hoping to appeal to the fellow biblical scholar in Strauss, Renan reminded him, that “war is a tissue of sins and an unnatural state” and that there is “a world superior to hatred, jealousy and pride.”²⁴ In this same spirit Renan urged Strauss that they together “dwell on those great precepts of peace to which men who are the dupes of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bernstein, “Intellectual Reactions to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870” (M.A. Thesis., Concordia University, 1993), 43-44.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 118.

their pride are oblivious, swayed as they are by their eternal and highly unphilosophical forgetfulness of death.”²⁵

On 2 October 1870, the German journal the *Gazette d'Augsbourg* published Strauss's response while refusing to print Renan's letter. At the time Renan was unaware of both Strauss's response and the fact that his letter had gone unpublished with it, as Paris had been under siege since 20 September making communications with the outside world impossible.²⁶ Moreover, the tone of Strauss's second letter was more belligerent than his first, as he ridiculed Renan's claim that Alsace and Lorraine belonged to France. Arrogant and boastful of Germany's progress in the war, Strauss, mocked Renan's pacifistic pleas, stating: "If you had spoken so to your French people, O Ernest Renan, and converted them to your peaceful beliefs, our soldiers would not soon be drinking choice French wines in Paris."²⁷

In April 1871, upon learning of Strauss's second letter and the fact that his own had gone unpublished, Renan was furious by what he saw as Strauss's moral deception. Thus, he went to work on a second letter to Strauss, which was published in November 1871.²⁸ By this time, Renan had developed some hindsight having lived through the French defeat and the traumatic experiences of the Siege of Paris and the Commune. In his second letter to Strauss Renan identifies the opposing ideological conceptions of a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Strauss regretted that the journal chose not to print Renan's letter but he nonetheless allowed his reply to appear alone. The three letters were eventually published in pamphlet form a few weeks later under the title *War and Peace* and sold for the benefit of wounded German soldiers. Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 118-119.

²⁷ Strauss to Renan, 29 September 1870, letter, in Bernstein, "Intellectual Reactions," 46.

²⁸ Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 124. It is unknown why Renan only learned of Strauss's second letter seven months after it was published. A likely explanation is the general disarray of Parisian life during this period as the city had been under siege by the Prussians, which was followed by the Commune. While Renan's second letter was published in November it was dated 15 September 1871.

nation that guide French and German political styles. Whereas France, Renan contends, is guided by a view of the nation, and of itself, as a "grand secular association" united by "common interests," German politics, as evidenced by its annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, is based upon an ethnographic view of the nation, in which race and language function as the criteria by which a nation is defined.²⁹ Prefiguring many of the points he would make eleven years later in "What is a nation?" Renan warns those who subscribe to this ethnographic view of humanity of both the fallacy of its claims when put under scientific scrutiny, as well as the dangers such a view may yield in the future.

Our politics is the politics of the right of nations. Yours is the politics of races. We believe that ours is preferable. The absolutely distinct division of humanity into races, beside the fact that it rests on a scientific error, very few countries possessing a truly pure race, can only lead to wars of extermination, to "zoological" wars, permit me to say, analogous to those that the diverse species of rodents or carnivores indulge in throughout life. This would be the end of this fertile *mélange*, composed of numerous and completely necessary elements, that we call humanity. You have raised before the world the flag of ethnographic and archeological politics. This politics will be fatal to you. Comparative philology, which you have created and which you have mistakenly transported to the field of politics, will play a dirty trick on you.³⁰

Thus, by employing an abbreviated form of the same means of comparative analysis he would in "What is a nation?" Renan argues that to view a nation as defined by the race or language of its constituent population is to ignore the reality of the makeup of modern European nations. These nations, Renan argues, are often composed of members who speak multiple languages and belong to several ethnic groups and have existed as such for some time.

Nation is not synonymous with race. Little Switzerland, so solidly built, counts three languages, three or four races, and two regions. A nation is a grand secular association (not eternal) between more or less equal related

²⁹ Ernest Renan to David Frederick Strauss, 15 September 1871, letter, in Corcoran, 233-234.

³⁰ Ibid, 233-234.

provinces forming a nucleus, around which gather other provinces tied one to another by common interests, or by accepted ancient facts, which have become interests. England, which is the most nearly perfect of nations, is the most muddled, from the point of view of ethnography and history. Pure Bretons, Romanized Bretons, Irish Caledonians, Anglo-Saxons, Danish, pure Normands, Frankish Normands, are all confounded in it.³¹

Turning his attention to German claims to Alsace-Lorraine, Renan attempted to demonstrate to Strauss the fallacious logic of the then popular German view, that Germany's annexation of the provinces was justified according to a German historical right.

If one does not admit a statute of limitations for the violence of the past, there will be endless war. Lorraine had been part of the German Empire, without doubt; but Holland, Switzerland, Italy herself, and if we go back beyond the treaty of Verdun (843), the whole of France including Catalonia, formed part of the German Empire. Alsace today is a German country by language and race; but before it was invaded by the Germans, Alsace like a great portion of southern Germany, was Celtic. We do not conclude from this fact that southern Germany ought to be French; but we do not wish to be told that by ancient right Metz and Luxembourg ought to be German. Nobody could say where this archeology might end. Almost everywhere that the enthusiastic German patriots claim a German right, we could claim a previous Celtic right. And before the Celtic period there were Finnish and Laplandish tribes and before them the cave dwellers; and before them orangutans. With such a philosophy of history there would exist no legitimate right in the world except that of the orangutans, who were unjustly disposed by the perfidy of the civilized peoples.³²

Thus, Renan's analysis upon the question of historical right, as a means on which to base a national right, is much like the one he would make in *What is a nation?*. In Renan's

³¹ Ibid, 234.

³² Ernest Renan, to David Frederick Strauss, 15 September 1871, in Hans Kohn, *The Making of the Modern French Mind* (New York: Van Norstrand, 1955), 158. To further demonstrate his point Renan cites the example of France's immorality if it were to act according those same principles by which Germany was justifying its claims to Alsace-Lorraine. He states: "Before the unfortunate annexation of Nice (1860), no part of France wished to separate herself from France; this was sufficient to make every dismemberment of France a European crime, though France was a unity neither in language or race. On the contrary, parts of Belgium and Switzerland, and to a general degree the Channel Islands, though they speak French, in no way wish to belong to France. This is sufficient to make any effort to annex them by force a criminal act." Ibid, 158-159.

view neither race, nor language nor culture are a legitimate criterion for the annexation of a people against their will. The fate of the Alsatians, Renan argues, should be determined according to their own wishes and desires, not by “abstractions” of what constitutes a people by an invading power that pays little heed to those they are seeking to control.

Let us be less absolute: besides the right of the dead, let us admit a little the right of the living . . . Europe is a confederation of states united by the common idea of civilization. The individuality of each nation is constituted no doubt by its race, its language, its history, its religion, but also by something much more tangible, by an actual agreement, by the will of the various provinces of the state to live together . . . Alsace is German by language and race, but she does not wish to belong to the German state; that settles the question. One speaks of the right of France, of the right of Germany. These abstractions mean much less to us than the right of the Alsatians, living human beings, to obey a power to which they consent.³³

Thus, for Renan, Germany’s failure to consider the wishes of the Alsatians contradicted the very principles, which he believed bound Europe as a civilization. Nationhood, Renan argues, must be based upon the wishes of the nation’s inhabitants. He states, “We do not admit the cession of souls. If the ceded territories were deserts, that would be fine. But the men who inhabit them are free creatures, and our duty is to see that they are respected as such.”³⁴

While the wording of the above passage is dissimilar to Renan’s conception of the nation in *What is a nation?*, his identification of a nation as a non-eternal, secular community united by its member’s common interests and sense of shared past, are all points he would reiterate and expand upon in his 1882 lecture. Thus, Renan’s exchange with Strauss served as the first forum in which he would begin to formulate his views on what it is that constitutes a nation. For Renan, the traumatic experience of the Franco-

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ernest Renan, to David Friederich Strauss, 15 September 1871, letter, in Corcoran, 233.

Prussian war, and more specifically Germany's claims to and eventual annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, served as the stimulus for his thoughts on nationality. Yet, while the subject of Alsace-Lorraine may have acted as the catalyst for Renan's work on nationality, his concern was not solely limited to the fate of the region but rather with what German claims to Alsace-Lorraine represented for European civilization.

Renan recognized that the age he was living in was to be dominated by nations and their concomitant nationalisms. His concern was the categorization of nation-states according to an ethnic or linguistic criteria. Referring to German claims to Alsace-Lorraine according to such a view Renan wrote, "There was . . . in this fact, which in the seventeenth century shocked no one, the germ of a grave embarrassment for the epoch when the ideas of nationalities would become the mistress of the world and would take, in questions of territorial delimitations, language and race as the criteria of legitimacy."³⁵

Thus, for Renan, Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, as justified by arguments over historical right, ethnicity or language, or a combination of the three, represented a movement away from the internationalist ideals he hoped would guide Europe into the future. In Renan's view, France had created the idea of nationality by opposing and breaking down the Roman Empire.³⁶ As such he considered it her "spiritual" duty, her national mission, to reintroduce a higher form of European political unity.³⁷ Indeed, "Renan's explicit goal," states Corcoran,

was a United States of Europe, formed by international cooperation, not national, racial or cultural hegemony. Such peace and cooperation seemed to be lost in the Franco-Prussian War. Germany had defaulted in her

³⁵ Cited in Henriette Psichari, "Renan et la Guerre de 70," in Corcoran, 232.

³⁶ A claim Renan repeats in "What is a nation?"

³⁷ Corcoran, "The Political Thought of Ernest Renan" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), 231.

responsibility, imposed by reason, as the strongest nation to guarantee peace on the basis of comity of interest rather than supremacy of power.³⁸

Renan contended that the war between France and Germany had started because, “the different European nations are too independent from each other and have no authority above them. There exists neither congress nor a parliament which would be superior to national sovereignties.”³⁹ In his article from September 1870, Renan had called for the establishment of such an organization hoping that future wars such as the one he was witnessing could be avoided.⁴⁰ For Renan, the creation of such a power was necessary to counter the threat of the rising tide of nationalism, as a united European federation could stand above national interests and prevent future conflict. On this point he wrote,

The principle of independent nationalities is not, as some think, capable of freeing mankind from the scourge of war. On the contrary, I have always felt that the principle of nationalities, substituted for the mild and paternal symbol of legitimacy, made the conflicts of nations degenerate into exterminations of races, and put an end to those tempers and polite attitudes which the small and political and dynastic wars of other times allowed. One will be able to end wars only after joining to the principle of nationalities the one principle, which can correct it, the principle of a European federation, superior to all the nationalities. Then the democratic

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ernest Renan, “La Guerre entre la France et L’Allemagne,” in Hans Kohn, *The Making of the Modern French Mind*, 153.

⁴⁰ Renan’s call for the establishment of the United States of Europe is the following: “The dream of pacifist utopians, a code of justice without an army to uphold its decisions, is a chimera. Nobody will obey it. On the other hand, the opinion that peace can be assured when one nation would have an uncontested superiority over the others is the opposite of truth; each nation, which exercises hegemony, prepares its own ruin by this fact alone, because it brings about a coalition of all other countries against itself. Peace cannot be established and maintained except by the common interest of Europe, or, if one prefers it, by a league of neutral powers ready to enforce peace. Justice has no chance to triumph between two contending parties, but between ten contending parties, justice wins out; for she alone offers a common basis of agreement. The only force capable of upholding a decision for the welfare of the European family against its most powerful member state lies in the power of the various states to unite, to intervene and to mediate. Let us hope that this force will assume ever more concrete and more regular forms and will lead in the future to a real congress, meeting periodically if not permanently. It will become the heart of the United States of Europe, bound by a federal pact.” Ibid, 153-154.

questions, differentiated from the questions of pure policy and diplomacy, would regain their importance.⁴¹

In Renan's view, the Franco-Prussian war had cast doubt upon Europe's ability to progress toward a form of multi-nationalism. For Renan, the war, Corcoran writes, "seemed to reaffirm Europe's inability to organize itself according to any other idea than the unitary conquest exemplified by classical and Christian Roman imperialism. The telling indicator for Renan was Germany's insistence upon annexation of Alsace-Lorraine."⁴²

Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine loomed so large in Renan's response to the Franco-Prussian war because it symbolized both the triumph of the "ethnographic politics" he despised as well as his dashed hope for a European order guided by a multi-national coalition of the Western European powers. His discussion on the nation and nationality, initiated by his dialogue with Strauss, was his reaction to what he saw as the encroaching hold by what he would later term those "transcendents of politics" which could justify territorial expansion according to a faulty view of the nation.⁴³

As to Renan's legacy, from the time of the Franco-Prussian war, it is decidedly mixed. While his experience and writings from the war were significant for his work on nationality, his non-partisan philosophical approach to the conflict provoked the ire of many of his fellow compatriots. Both at the time of the Franco-Prussian war and in the years since the conflict, Renan, has often been criticized as being unpatriotic. Two points in Renan's response to the conflict have accounted for his reputation as a "traitor" or

⁴¹ Ibid, 155-156.

⁴² Corcoran, "The Political Thought of Ernest Renan" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), 232.

⁴³ Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?" 20.

“collaborator”: his Germanism and his attack on democracy.⁴⁴ Both feature prominently in what would be Renan’s last major work from this time, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, which was published on 6 November 1871.

La Réforme intellectuelle et morale was Renan’s response to what he saw as the ills that had befallen France and which, he argued, had partially contributed to its defeat in 1871. The essay is divided into two parts: I. *Le Mal* and II. *Les remèdes*. France’s malady, Renan contends, is a weakness of moral fiber. This weakness, Renan argues, was in great part a result of the moral inefficiency of the French Catholic education system with its contempt for learning, and scientific knowledge. The rejection of scientific thought, Renan argued, had particularly crippled France, as no modern nation could be militarily prepared without it. Furthermore, Renan believed that French society had come to be dominated by a materialism, equalitarianism, civic irresponsibility and general lack of selfless devotion to the *patrie*, all vices he attributed to the country’s revolutionary heritage.⁴⁵ As for the remedies Renan offered to quell this crisis, these included: the restoration of a strongly authoritarian—though still constitutional—monarchy which would be supported by a social hierarchy consisting of a nobility, scientists, scholars and the army.⁴⁶

Interestingly, *La Réforme*’s undemocratic tone and Germanism, the two elements for which Renan was to be most criticized, were interconnected. Renan’s abandonment of a classic liberalism, which held that some degree of division and discord were necessary for the establishment of true freedom for both the individual within a state and

⁴⁴ See, Bernstein, “Intellectual Reactions to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870” (M.A. Thesis., Concordia University, 1993), 20-72 and 118-143. Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan* 94-97.

⁴⁵ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 93.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the state as it exists among other states, was based upon his belief that the French defeat by Prussia in 1870 was the result of corrupt attitudes instilled in the French by their Revolution. Renan feared that France was becoming a “second-rate America,” a nation which, in his view, was barbaric and uncultured and prized commerce above all else. In order for France to change its course domestically and prosper as a great nation internationally, Renan argued that the country had “to reshape itself on the very power that had defeated her: Prussia.”⁴⁷ Renan makes this point explicit in *La Réforme* stating, “There exists an excellent model of the manner in which a nation can lift itself up from the most extreme disasters. It is Prussia herself who gives us this example.”⁴⁸ More specifically, Renan equates the French experience of the Franco-Prussian war with the Prussian experience following the Peace of Tilsit, in which Prussia was stripped of half its territory and suffered a sense of national humiliation.⁴⁹ For Renan the analogous nature of these historical situations as well as the social structure of Prussian society made Prussia an example that France should emulate. Ironically, Renan particularly admired the Prussian military class and the fact that it was born out of its hereditary nobility.⁵⁰ Moreover, Renan argued that the regeneration of France should be led by the intellectuals, just as “the University of Berlin was the centre of the regeneration in

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ernest Renan, “La Rêforme intellectuelle et morale,” in “The Political Thought of Ernest Renan”, Paul Corcoran (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), 216.

⁴⁹ The “Peace of *Tilsit*” refers to two treaties signed by Napoleon I of France following the aftermath of his victory at *Friedland* at the town of Tilsit in July 1807. These treaties brought an end to the war between Imperial Russia and the French Empire. The first treaty was signed on 7 July 1807 by the Russian Tsar Alexander. The second was signed with Prussia on 9 July 1807. The treaties united the French and the Russians in an alliance that rendered the rest of Europe almost powerless. Prussia was forced to reduce its army to 40,000 as well as pay an indemnity of 100,000,000 francs. In both Russia and Prussia the treaty was seen as largely unequal and as a source of national humiliation.

⁵⁰ Renan, “La Réforme,” in “The Political Thought of Ernest Renan” Paul Corcoran (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), 219-220.

Germany” following its national humiliation in 1807.⁵¹ Renan suggested that Prussia “offer[ed] the best model” for the type of society that would come out of his proposed reforms.⁵² While this society might have existed as an ideal in his mind, Renan saw the Prussian example as the closest representation to “the developed and corrected *ancien regime*.”⁵³ In this society, Renan states,

The individual is taken, elevated, fashioned, trained, disciplined, unceasingly demanded of by a society deriving from the past, molded in ancient institutions, arrogating itself as the mistress of morality and reason. The individual in this system gives enormously to the State. He receives in exchange from the State a strong moral and intellectual culture, as well as the joy of participating in a grand work. Those societies are particularly noble, they create science, they guide the human spirit, they make history; but they are from time to time enfeebled by the reclamations of individual egoism, which finds the burden that the State imposes upon him too heavy to carry.⁵⁴

As Chadbourne describes it, Renan’s championing of the Prussian model can best be described as a call for a *revanche supérieure*.⁵⁵ Renan, Chadbourne writes, was not calling for “military revenge, but a more complex and subtle type (*revanche supérieure*), which consists of assimilating from a victorious enemy qualities that will enable her victim to emerge with renewed moral and intellectual superiority.”⁵⁶

For some, Renan’s advocacy in *La Réforme* of the Prussian model for the newly defeated French regime, presents a paradox when contrasted with his hatred for German

⁵¹ Renan, “La Réforme,” in *Ernest Renan*, H.W. Wardman, 128. While it is tempting to point out the irony in Renan’s choice of Treitschke’s University of Berlin, as the example which French intellectuals should follow, it should be remembered that Renan’s citing of the University of Berlin referred to the institution as it existed in the early nineteenth century.

⁵² Renan, “La Réforme,” in “The Political Thought of Ernest Renan” Paul Corcoran (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), 226.

⁵³ Ibid, 226.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 216.

⁵⁵ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 93

⁵⁶ Ibid.

racial politics. As one of his later biographers, H.W. Wardman wrote, "It is curious . . . that in the preface [of *La Réforme*, Renan] announces his entire disillusionment with Germany and German nationalism. The *Réforme* was an odd way of showing this disillusionment, with its admiration for Prussian discipline, moral and intellectual, not to mention chastity!"⁵⁷

Indeed, what makes Renan's championing of the Prussian model so odd is that his work on nationality consistently attacked Prussian style "ethnographic politics." Chadbourne explains Renan's ability to reconcile these two facets of Prussian life, by claiming that Renan had subscribed to the belief that there are "two Germanies":

The gentler, more liberal and humanistic Germany of the "moral German" (*l'Allemand moral*) and the ironhanded, force-worshiping Germany of the "corrupt German" (*l'Allemand démoralisé*) symbolized by Prussia. Renan believed that the former would eventually purge the latter: *La Prusse passera, l'Allemagne restera*.⁵⁸

Renan was not alone in his admiration of German society. Indeed, many French intellectuals of the period, at least prior to the outbreak of war, "held a deep interest in and admiration for German culture, and evinced great sympathy for the German movement towards freedom and unity."⁵⁹ Thus, for many French intellectuals, the outbreak of war "aroused the utmost consternation" as many of them "cast about desperately for a just peace while many others were in two minds."⁶⁰ While the French defeat in 1871 led to the development of anti-German sentiments throughout France this

⁵⁷ Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 129-130.

⁵⁸ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 95.

⁵⁹ Frederick Hertz, *The German Public Mind in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History of German Political Sentiments, Aspirations and Ideas* (Totowa N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 333. *The Revue des deux Mondes* (as well as other French periodicals) possessed a group of contributors who were predominantly Germanophile. Thus, for Renan it most likely served as the logical choice in which to publish "La Guerre entre la France et l'Allemagne."

⁶⁰ Ibid.

did not translate into a yearning for military confrontation with Germany. Indeed, as Robert Gildea states: "Revenge against Germany was talked about after 1870, but only to maintain the illusion of French greatness, never as a viable option."⁶¹ On the contrary, the German military and political superiority inspired French intellectuals and politicians to emulate German successes.⁶² For instance, French historians Gabriel Monod (1844-1913) and Hippolyte Taine (1828-93) strove to understand the conflict from an impartial perspective.⁶³ Monod's memoir of the conflict, *Allemands et Français* (1871) was "surprisingly free of bias"⁶⁴ and Taine began to explore the past to find the possible causes of German superiority.⁶⁵ Four years after the French defeat a young Ernest Lavisse, then a student in Göttingen, who would later become the foremost French nationalist historian of the Third Republic, began his historical career by investigating the reasons for Prussian military and political superiority.⁶⁶ Lavisse's motivation, writes Pierre Nora, was the "enigma of the German victory," he "wanted to reveal to his vanquished compatriots the secret of their defeat."⁶⁷ Moreover, like Renan, Lavisse admired the way in which German universities took responsibility for shaping the public

⁶¹ Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 120-121.

⁶² Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 189-190.

⁶³ Hertz, *The German Public Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 334.

⁶⁴ Pim Den Boer, *History as a Profession: The Study of History in France, 1818-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 288.

⁶⁵ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*, 190. Taine often agreed with Renan's views as both a reviewer of his work, as he was for *La Réforme*, or as a scholar in his own right. For example, in his six-volume work *Les Origines de la France Contemporaine*, Taine came to similar conclusions as Renan had in *La Réforme*, criticizing France's revolutionary tradition and its adverse effect upon the French national consciousness. Hertz, *The German Public Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 335.

⁶⁶ Lavisse's thesis topic was entitled *The Mask of Brandenburg Under the Ascanian Dynasty: Essay on the Origins of the Prussian Monarchy*. Pierre Nora, "Lavisse, The Nation's Teacher," in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. II: Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 155. Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 202.

⁶⁷ Nora, "Lavisse, The Nation's Teacher", 155.

spirit. Lavisser's position, Nora states, was that German institutions should not be "servilely imitated" but that,

they were to be transplanted into French soil in such a way as to preserve what was essential, namely, the link between knowledge and patriotism. Lavisser explicitly stated that in creating his monumental history of France and in drafting new programs of primary education, his goal was the same: to transmit that *pietas erga patriam* [piety towards the fatherland] that gave Germany its strength.⁶⁸

Thus, while Renan may have been the only French scholar to openly advocate the Prussian model, the concept of *revanche supérieure* seems to have motivated other French historians of the period as well. Moreover, like Renan, Taine and Lavisser could never reconcile themselves to the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Their positions on the subject echo many of the points Renan made in his case against annexation. For example, Taine considered the attitude of the Alsatians and Lorrainers as the most important point to be considered in light of calls for their annexation, a point Renan makes both in his letters to Strauss and later in *What is a nation?*⁶⁹ Lavisser's position, that any conquest that forces human beings against their will is unjust, was also a persistent theme in Renan's writings on the subject.⁷⁰ Like Renan, Lavisser saw the issue of Alsace-Lorraine as one of international morality in which Germany had done an injustice to the French people.

Lavisser portrays France itself as representing the interests of humanity writing:

Against an Empire founded on force and sustained by it, an Empire that has sacrificed the rights of thousands of men to the rules of strategy, the French Republic stands for those violated rights. If, some day, in a great European melee, it reclaims the territory stripped from the indivisible Fatherland, it will be able to do so in the name of humanity . . . Since that dreadful year [1871] I have not for one minute given up hope. I have

⁶⁸ Ibid, 160.

⁶⁹ Hertz, *The German Public Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 334.

⁷⁰ Nora, "Lavisser, The Nation's Teacher", 161.

tirelessly preached that hope, and the confidence I feel, to millions of children. I have said that we have a permanent duty to the lost provinces, and repeated it often. Strasbourg's spire has never vanished from my horizon. To me it has always stood apart, soaring heavenward: "I am Strasbourg, I am Alsace, I salute you, I am waiting."⁷¹

The defeat of 1871 effected a fundamental change in the traditional modes of thought on the question of nationalism in France. Following the war French nationalism became more strident, pessimistic and at times aggressive.⁷² Part of this change manifested itself in a "revival in historical interest in France's national past" that sought to "stimulate a rebirth of national sentiment and self-confidence."⁷³ Thus, this discussion will now turn to Renan's view of the nation as it related to the articulation of the nation-state as outlined in the French nationalist discourse.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*, 191. The more aggressive elements of French political culture of the period are to be found in the creation of the Ligue des Patriotes in 1882, which was led by Paul Déroulède. The purpose of the Ligue, writes Gildea, was to "keep the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine at the forefront of French concerns and to prepare the young generation of French people physically and mentally for revenge." Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 121.

⁷³ Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 122. Along with a rise in nationalist history, French nationalism of the period was marked by a rise of French military-culture, cults of heroism, and a renewed emphasis on colonialism. These were all employed as means by which the French dealt with the trauma of their defeat. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 118-135.

Chapter Five: Treitschke, Renan and European Historiography

The preceding chapters have analyzed Treitschke's and Renan's conceptions of the nation-state as they were first put forth in their primary texts as well as their relationship to the events of the Franco-Prussian war and Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. The final context in which Treitschke's and Renan's views on the nation-state will be considered is their relationship to the national tradition of historiography, which constituted the dominant mode of historical practice during the period in which both Treitschke and Renan produced their opposing conceptions. Like many of the early exponents of theories on nationalism, there exists an intimate relationship between their views and the broader historiographical trends at the time.¹

The national tradition of historical writing was the product of two interconnected processes that came to define nineteenth century historiography. The first was the centrality of questions of national identity that accompanied those tumultuous events of the nineteenth century that changed the face of the European geo-political landscape. Until 1815 the Napoleonic Wars had disrupted much of the continent and in 1848 revolutions swept across many of its countries. Out of this restructuring of the European order came the rise to prominence of the nation-state in the founding of new 'national' states such as Greece in 1830, Belgium in 1831, Italy in 1861, Germany in 1871 and Romania, Serbia and Montenegro in 1878.² The appearance of these new states only heightened the need for the newly emerging, as well as the older established, European nation-states to articulate their sense of national identity.

¹ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 19.

² Ibid, 5.

At this same time, the nineteenth century, Stefan Berger notes, “witnessed the increasing professionalisation of historical writing and the rigorous application of methodological ground rules.”³ It evolved first in the German university system and was soon adopted in France, Italy and Britain at some point during the second half of the nineteenth century. What followed was the establishment of the first university chairs in history, the creation of historical societies, which collected and published historical documents, and the founding of historians’ own professional journals.⁴ The result of this professionalisation in historical studies, Berger states, was that it provided a “basis for a self-confident and exclusive self-understanding of the historical profession which now began to distinguish between ‘professional historians’ and ‘dilettantes’.”⁵ More emphasis was placed upon the scientific approach of historical investigation especially as it related to the ‘objective’ use of archival source material. Yet, the adoption of these “methodological ground rules,” Berger states, was not “particularly successful in preventing the continued legitimacy use of historical writings.”⁶ On the contrary, these newly institutionalized bodies of European historians adopted partisan attitudes to both their historical investigations and the contemporary political battles of their time, while simultaneously “insisting their politics had no influence on their scholarliness and in particular on their objectivity as scholars.”⁷ Thus, in this highly politicized atmosphere, nineteenth century academic historians increasingly took on the role of “national

³ Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, “Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800,” in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4.

⁴ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 20.

⁵ Berger, “Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800,” 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. It should be noted that the German historical establishment was at the forefront of this trend by demanding that its members had to be partisan (*parteilich*), and that they take a stance in contemporary political battles.

pedagogues”⁸ whose function was to articulate a sense of national identity of their respective countries. Through their research they aimed at “discovering (or inventing) the distant origins and ancient glories of their people.”⁹ To do so, national historians turned to the history, language, folklore, territory, culture or religion of their respective nation-states, to demonstrate the past traditions of their nation as “symbolic evidence of its historic continuity and hence its authenticity.”¹⁰ Thus, in the national tradition the historian functioned as “nation-builder” by writing multi-volume works to narrate the history of his particular nation.¹¹ Furthermore, as Berger points out,

the institutionalization of professional history-writing and its close links with the task of nation-building led to relatively high levels of conformity among professional historians. The state, which wielded considerable powers over the appointment and promotion of ‘professional’ historians at the universities and research institutes, often had a clear idea of which histories and historians it wanted to promote.¹²

Thus, national histories were written to sustain and develop national identities and bolster allegiances to the respective nation-state that was being chronicled. They formed, writes Stuart Woolf, “part of the process of deliberate ‘nation-building,’ which spread through Europe in the later part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the political elites sought to strengthen the ties to their people to the old and newly formed nation

⁸ Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in German Since 1800*, (Providence: Berghen Books, 1997), 9.

⁹ Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present*, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 20.

¹² It is important to add that, as Berger notes, throughout Western Europe, “the degrees of conformity encouraged by such state intervention differed quite substantially.” The strongest example was nineteenth century Germany where a small group of professors controlled the *cursus honorum* leading to academic titles and careers. Whereas in France and Britain, “academic historians were able to move in and out of the historical profession much more freely than in Germany, where a greater degree of professionalisation also meant once a historian always a historian.” Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, “Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800,” 8.

states.”¹³ Consequently, national histories were characterized by a general lack of analytical distance between the historian and his subject nation resulting in written histories largely devoid of impartiality. Rather, the intent of historians in the national tradition was to demonstrate the uniqueness of their particular nation-state.¹⁴ To do so, nationalist historians increasingly essentialized the alleged national characteristics of their respective country. Consequently, “identifiably divergent traditions of conceptualizing nations and nationalism can be unearthed from within the varied national histories written across Europe in the nineteenth century.”¹⁵ Whereas much of British historiography of the period was concerned with “demonstrating the civilisatory progress achieved by Britain through its championing of liberty and constitutional values, and through its long and continuous parliamentary tradition,” French historians came to perceive their nation as the champion of their revolutionary slogan of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*.”¹⁶ In the French national tradition, the slogan of the French revolution of 1789 came to symbolize “that it was in France that the Third Estate had for the first time, truly become a nation.”¹⁷ Whereas the Germans saw their national character in what they believed to be the superiority of German culture and scholarship in particular, the Italian nationalist discourse celebrated the country’s ancient culture and traditions. Thus, in their efforts to demonstrate the uniqueness of their respective countries, each of these nationalist discourses proposed that their nations followed “special paths” thereby attributing to them eternal characteristics. To demonstrate this point, nationalist

¹³ Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present*, 3.

¹⁴ Ibid, 19.

¹⁵ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 20.

¹⁶ Berger, “Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800,” 9.

¹⁷ Ibid.

historians, Berger writes, “constructed national teleologies designed to legitimate the present and prevent future change. They read national histories backward to arrive at foundational dates for their respective national histories.”¹⁸ For example, Whig historians in Britain, such as Thomas Babington Macauley, provided their nation with its powerful myth of evolutionary progress—founded on its tradition of liberal parliamentarianism—by tracing the British constitution as it had evolved throughout the ages. Thus, the foundational dates in Whig historiography were 1215 with the signing of the Magna Carta and the revolution of 1688, which were seen as having initiated the British parliamentary tradition.¹⁹ By stressing the singular significance of the ‘Great Revolution’ the foundational date for French nationalist historiography became 1789. On the other hand, German historians championed the concepts of ethnicity and cultural identity as constituting the core of the “national spirit.” It was argued that the German cultural identity had long been established throughout German territories and that political unity would be the natural result of this cultural identity.²⁰ German nationalist historians sought to demonstrate, that “it was not politics which brought true liberation to the individual self, but rather, that the powerful state was to protect the innermost search of the individual for true fulfillment of his (rarely her) potential.”²¹ When German unity was fulfilled, 1871 became the foundational date for German nationalist historiography as the Reich took on an increasingly large role in the self-definition of the German nation-

¹⁸ Ibid, 11.

¹⁹ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 9-10. Berger, “Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800,” 10-11. James Joll, *National Histories and National Historians: Some German and English Views of the Past* (London: German Historical Institute, 1985), 8.

²⁰ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 9.

²¹ Berger, “Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800,” 10-11.

state. Thus, for each variety of national history, these foundational dates in-turn became connected to the creation of foundational myths.²² The result, Woolf states, was that,

by the 1840's [and] almost uninterruptedly from the later nineteenth century until the second world war, such historians interpreted the history of their country in a teleological manner, as culminating inevitably in the nation state, whether monarchical or republican. The destiny of the nation not only explained its past, but often justified the state's imperialist ambitions . . . The assumption that a 'national spirit' could be followed like a red thread through the centuries, laid down with academic authority to a lay audience . . . became through endless simplification and repetition in school and family, uncritical dogma. Historians thus contributed, at best, to the pride and collective ideals intrinsic to a sense of national sentiment; but also, at worst to the aggressive political projects of the extreme right . . .²³

While the national histories written in the second half of the nineteenth century are most commonly associated with their role in instilling nationalist sentiment they also reveal an articulation of the nation-state as the logical consequence of historical progress. Each of the divergent traditions was guided by the historian's belief in the 'naturalness' and inevitability of the nation-state.²⁴ As Lambert describes it, "the historians awareness of what Milan Kundera has termed the 'unobviousness' of nations was pivotal to their approach to writing national histories."²⁵ For the practitioners of nationalist historiography, the "very triumph of the nation-state" was seen as a confirmation of their teleological reading of history.²⁶ Consequently, despite the particular qualities proposed to render each nation unique from one-another, all nationalist historians, generally

²² Ibid, 11.

²³ Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present*, 2-3.

²⁴ Ibid, 2.

²⁵ Peter Lambert, "Paving the Peculiar Path: German nationalism and historiography since Ranke," in *Imagining Nations*, ed. Geoffrey Cubitt (New York: St. Martins Press, 1998) 6.

²⁶ Woolf, ed., *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present*, 3.

assumed without question that humanity is divided into distinct enclaves called 'nations', and that these nations had a unique right to sovereignty and political representation.²⁷

As stated earlier, Treitschke's and Renan's views on the nation-state are inextricably tied to the national traditions of their respective countries. The articulation of the nation-state, as put forth in the nationalist German and French historiographical discourse, served as both the philosophical and professional context in which both men produced their theories. As such both Treitschke's and Renan's definitions of the nation-state do correspond to specific visions of the nation as articulated by their respective national historiographies. Whereas the French emphasized the political construction of the nation, the German view of the nation-state was characterized by its emphasis on history, culture and ethnicity.

Regarding Treitschke's place within the German national tradition, he, more than most historians of his time, came to epitomize the role of "nationalist pedagogue" of German academia. As Berger states, "Nationalist historiography was to find its climax in the Berlin historian Heinrich von Treitschke."²⁸ His appointment in April 1874 to the University of Berlin, the venue of his "Politics" lectures and from which he would wield his greatest influence, was awarded not on the basis of his scholarship but for his ability to "encourage his students to develop a national identity."²⁹ As discussed previously, his Berlin seminars were widely attended by the future elites of Wilhelmine Germany, and were highly influential.³⁰ In his unfinished five-volume magnum opus *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, Treitschke presents Germany's national history as

²⁷ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 19.

²⁸ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 30.

²⁹ Ibid, 31.

³⁰ See chapter one.

being made by a series of “gigantic Hohenzollern heroes” thus legitimating the powerful legend of Prussia’s German vocation.³¹ In the dedication to this work, Treitschke makes no apology as to the work’s intended function, stating that it was written to awaken the reader to “the joy of having a fatherland”³² thus arousing within the German people, “that unanimous sense of joyous gratitude which older nations feel towards their political heroes.”³³

As to Treitschke’s place within the pantheon of German nationalist historians of the nineteenth century, he straddled two schools, drawing from and contributing to both. The first was the so-called Prussian school, which from the first half of the nineteenth century, had, in Berger’s words, “turned politics into metaphysics” by “judging every political event according to what was allegedly historically necessary, i.e., the building of a German nation by Prussia.”³⁴ Members of the Prussian school included its founder Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), Frederick Christoph Dahlmann (1785-1860), and Heinrich von Sybel (1817-1895).³⁵ Treitschke’s faith in Prussia’s destined vocation as the unifier of a German state can be traced back to his student days at the University of Bonn in 1851, where he attended lectures by staunch nationalists such as Ernst Moritz Arndt and Dahlmann, the latter of whom had an immense influence upon Treitschke.³⁶

³¹ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 31.

³² Ibid.

³³ Gordon A. Craig, introduction to *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, by Heinrich von Treitschke, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), xiv.

³⁴ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 29.

³⁵ Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought From Herder to the Present*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 90-124. It should be noted that the Prussian historians are also referred to as the *kleindeutsch* historians. *Kleindeutsch* = “little German”: refers to support for a Prussian centered policy over a “Greater Germany” that included Austria. Bernhard Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation: Collective Identity in a German Axial Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 125.

³⁶ Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples: Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism*, 109-110. Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769-1860) was an early German nationalist who preached the virtues of a pure German race and

Treitschke's faith in Prussia's vocation for the establishment of a German nation-state was a recurring theme in his writings during the days of the Franco-Prussian war and his calls for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.³⁷ Following unification, Treitschke continued to place Prussia at the centre of German national life arguing that out of all the states of the German Empire, Prussia was the only one that had retained its sovereignty as a result of its military and political dominance over the other German states.³⁸

The second group with which Treitschke is associated is the neo-Rankean school, which some argue replaced the Prussian school during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.³⁹ Following in the tradition of their namesake, the neo-Rankeans prided themselves on stressing the objectivity of historical study more than the Prussians, yet much like the Prussians the function of history in their view remained the preservation of the idea of nationality. Treitschke's connection to this group was not so much to its methodological orientation, but to the views espoused by its more right wing members, such as Georg von Below, Karl Lamprecht, Otto Hoetzsch and Dietrich Schafer who together came to be regarded as the Pan-German historians. These historians both supported and called for an escalation in Germany's imperialist ventures as well as the

language as signs of the German peoples inherent superiority. Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 75-80. Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann (1785-1860) was a historian who believed deeply in Prussia's role in bringing about a new strong German state. Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 109.

³⁷ Treitschke makes this point in "What We Demand From France" stating, "Who is strong enough to rule these lost lands, and to recover them, by a salutary discipline, for German life? Prussia, and Prussia alone." Heinrich von Treitschke, *Germany, Russia, France & Islam*, (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1915), 158. In a speech to the Reichstag on the Incorporation of Alsace-Lorraine into the German Empire, when the annexation of the provinces was no longer a possibility but a foregone conclusion, Treitschke reiterated this point, stating, "The task of re-incorporating these alienated races of German stock into our country is so great and difficult that it can only be trusted to experienced hands, and where is there a political power in the German Empire which has so well proved its talent for Germanisation as glorious old Prussia?" Treitschke *Germany, Russia, France & Islam*, 180.

³⁸ Treitschke based this claim on the fact that the Prussian King Wilhelm was the supreme commander of the German army and that Prussia alone had enough votes on the German federal council to prevent any alteration of the Constitution. Treitschke, *Politics*, 18.

³⁹ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 32.

continuation of its monarchic government and the increasing growth of its civil service and army. The Pan-Germans are generally characterized by their social-Darwinist perspective, which expressed itself through various “diffusions of organic imagery” thus contributing to “the aggressive nationalist Zeitgeist so characteristic of the Wilhelmine period of Germany history.”⁴⁰

Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century the national tradition had become the dominant discourse in German historiography.⁴¹ Philosophically, it was guided by what is generally referred to as historicism. As it concerns Treitschke, the view of the nation-state as seen through the lens of German historicism served as the philosophical foundation that most greatly informed his views on the state and nationalism. While many of the national traditions in Europe during this period were influenced by the historicist approach, it received “its most radical expression” in Germany.⁴² As Isaiah Berlin contends, historicism “first found systematic expression among German thinkers” where it soon “acquired the status of an almost official philosophy of history.”⁴³ Moreover, historicism, as the philosophical foundation for the German national tradition, was since its inception “historically connected with the rise of the national German state.”⁴⁴

The essence of the historicist stance was that “there is a fundamental difference between the phenomena of nature and those of history.”⁴⁵ Whereas nature, in the historicist’s view, is “the scene of the eternally recurring, of phenomena themselves

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 21.

⁴² Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 6.

⁴³ Isaiah Berlin, “Meinecke and Historicism,” in *The Power of Ideas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 2000), 205-206.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 5.

devoid of conscious purpose,” history “comprises unique and unduplicable human acts, filled with volition and intent.”⁴⁶ For the historicists, states Iggers, “The world of man is in a state of incessant flux, although within it there are centers of stability (personalities, institutions, nations, epochs), each possessing an inner structure, a character, and each in constant metamorphosis in accord with its own internal principles of development.”⁴⁷ Thus, historicism operates from the assumption that there “is no constant in human nature.”⁴⁸ Rather, a person’s or people’s character reveals itself only according to one’s particular development. As a result historicism insists that history is the only guide to understanding things human as the “abstract, classificatory methods of the natural sciences are . . . inadequate models for the study of the human world.”⁴⁹ For the historicists, the human world, Berlin explains, “could be felt, or intuited, or understood by a species of direct acquaintance” but “it could not be taken to pieces and reassembled even in thought, like a mechanism compounded of isolable parts, obedient to universal and unfaltering causal laws.”⁵⁰ Thus, historicism represents a tradition of historical thought which rejected the Enlightenment doctrine of natural law. Whereas natural law theory conceived of the universe in terms of timeless and absolute truths, which correspond to a rational order, historicism replaced this belief with an understanding of the fullness and diversity of man’s historical experience.⁵¹

The early Romantics were the first to articulate the historicist view of the nation-state which in nationalism studies is one and the same as an organicist understanding of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Isaiah Berlin, “Meinecke and Historicism,” 205.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the nation.⁵² This organic view of the nation-state is based upon the historicist conception “of all human activities as elements in unified ‘organic’ social wholes, not static institutional structures, but dynamic processes of development”⁵³ As part of this process, nations and cultures were viewed as “social ‘organisms’ held together by impalpable and complex relationships which characterized living social wholes.”⁵⁴ Thus, nation-states, in the historicist vision, constituted “quasi-biological entities which defied analysis by the exact quantitative analysis” of the natural sciences.⁵⁵

Johann Gottfried Herder was the first to propose an organic view of the nation insisting that “within the flux of history” nations represent centers of relative stability.⁵⁶ Nations, in Herder’s view, “possess a morphology; they are alive they grow.”⁵⁷ As such, nations, Herder contends, have “the characteristics of persons: they have a spirit and they have a lifespan. They are not a collection of individuals, but are organisms.”⁵⁸ Thus, for Herder, nations were pre-political entities whose roots lie in the culture, language and ethnicity of their component population.⁵⁹ Herder proposed that these roots form the basis of national identity, which in the German case manifested itself within the *Volk* (people) who formed a *Blutsgemeinschaft* (community of blood), and which harbored a

⁵² Smith, *The Nation in History*, 9-10.

⁵³ Berlin, “Meinecke and Historicism,” 205.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 35. Herder first presented these views in one of his earlier works *Also a Philosophy of History* (1774). According to Iggers, Herder’s early work was the first to express the historicist position in its radical form by proposing that every age must be viewed in terms of its immediate values and that there is no progress or decline in history, only value filled diversity. In his later life, Herder retreated from his more extreme positions. Ibid, 30, 34.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 24.

Volksseele (national soul) and *Volksgeist* (national spirit).⁶⁰ Thus, in Herder's view, nationalism had little to do with the state, politics or citizenship but rather resided in what he saw as the individuality of each nation. Herder proposed a concept of individuality, which essentially transferred the individuality normally accorded to the individual to the national community, thus rendering the nation as unique and self-contained.⁶¹ This view of the German nation and nationality as organic entities that form "a specific historical individuality," had enormous influence upon subsequent generations of historians as it contained "certain implications for political theory."⁶² As Iggers writes, Herder's concept of individuality "assumes that there are no universally valid values, that ethics cannot be based upon precepts of reason or upon the assumption of a common human nature. Rather, all values come out of the spirit of nations."⁶³ While Herder's influence upon future German historians of the national tradition is undeniable, his ideas, Berger points out, were developed within the context of an enlightened cosmopolitanism and as such "cannot be viewed un-problematically as a direct precursor of nineteenth-century German nationalism."⁶⁴ Rather, the influence of Herder's idea of the nation, within the "diverse codifications of nationalism formulated in the nineteenth century," was that it served as a philosophical platform on which German nationalist intellectuals could base their views. For example, J.G. Fichte's *Address to the German nation* (1806) took Herder's ideas one step further by "putting the German collective identity above anyone

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kohn, *The Mind of Germany*, 51.

⁶² Ibid. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 35.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ As the following quote demonstrates, Herders writings on nationality often contained a universalist, cosmopolitan and humanitarian character: "However much we love our nation, such sentiments should never prevent us from recognizing that everything which is good has only been achieved in the course of the evolutionary progress of all peoples over time." Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 24.

else's."⁶⁵ Fichte argued that the German nation was the original nation as distinguished by the genius of the German language, which he regarded as the original language of mankind, the *Ursprache*. As representative of a particularly unique and original nation, Germany had to guard against being contaminated by other nations as its salvation depended on the preservation of its culture and language.⁶⁶ The influence of Herder and Fichte's work upon the German national tradition was that it outlined an organic theory of the nation which nineteenth-century German nationalist historians interpreted as a "justification for a xenophobic idea of a national collectivity based on the Volk."⁶⁷ By the mid-nineteenth century this organic view of the German nation, as defined by its Volk, had become commonplace amongst German historians.⁶⁸ Thus, with regards to Treitschke many of his views are representative of the commonly held beliefs at the time.

Treitschke's view of the nation-state, as outlined in previous chapters, is essentially in line with historicist assumptions. His belief that nation-states are primordial, that they exist as individual personalities and that "common-blood" serves as the strongest indicator of nationality are all historicist in character and generally speaking

⁶⁵ Ibid. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 41.

⁶⁶ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 24. Kedourie explains the intricacies of Fichte's arguments and the means by which he furthered Herder's views on language as the following: "Herder had argued that for a man to speak a foreign language was to live an artificial life, to be estranged from the spontaneous, instinctive sources of his personality. With great ingenuity, Fichte works out the political ramifications of this broad and general contention. He tries to show, for instance, that the mere presence of foreign vocables within a language can do great harm, by contaminating the very springs of public morality. When foreign terms relating to political and social life are introduced into a language, those who speak it are unsure of the exact connotations of those terms and they fall into confusions which can lead to great harm." Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1960) 58.

⁶⁷ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 24. Herder and Fichte represent only two of many German intellectuals who contributed to the historicist approach. Their inclusion in this essay is due to the centrality of their ideas to the organic view of the nation. For a more complete discussion on the philosophical foundations of German historicism, see: Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Kohn, *The Mind of Germany; Prelude to Nation-States: The French and German experience, 1789-1815*, Berlin, *Political Ideas In the Romantic Age; The Power of Ideas*.

⁶⁸ Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 24.

conform to the organic definition of the nation.⁶⁹ Moreover, the Volkish rationale he employed to demand the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine is also indicative of historicist thought as it was interpreted by much of the nineteenth century German historical establishment. As Dorpalen points out, Treitschke's intellectual orientation as a whole was guided by his rejection of natural law theory, which he saw as "artificial and mendacious."⁷⁰ By revolting against the "central classical and Christian concept of a world governed by a single, static natural law" Treitschke was able to rationalize his claim that humanity is fundamentally unequal.⁷¹ Indeed, "his entire philosophy," states Dorpalen, "bears the imprint of this repudiation of all values above and beyond the state and led him increasingly to distrust and deprecate everything non-German."⁷² While the fundamentals of Treitschke's thought are rooted in eighteenth century historicist assumptions concerning the German nation, his state-centered perspective, and his belief that the will of the state supercedes that of the individual, was characteristic of the historical discourse of the second half of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the rise to prominence of the Prussian school which increasingly came to identify the German state's importance to the German nation.

⁶⁹ Despite labeling Treitschke's view of the nation-state as organicist in *Politics* Treitschke states that he is opposed to terming the state as an "organism." Rather, as discussed in chapter one, he preferred to label the state as a "great collective personality." Treitschke understood that to regard the state as an organism in earlier times "had a certain justification" in order to discredit "the mechanical view" of the state and that its use was necessary to "emphasize the doctrine that the State develops naturally, as an automatic product of the people's will." Still he preferred to treat the state as a person as this implied it had a conscious will, which was the essence of the state, whereas there "are countless organisms without conscious will." Furthermore, he saw the term organism as itself problematic, as "the boundary between organic and inorganic life has begun to fluctuate" thereby rendering the term indefinable. Treitschke, *Politics*, 12. Treitschke's opposition to describing the state as an organism does not negate the fact that his views on the nation-state conform to an organicist definition of the nation-state and nationality as understood in contemporary nationalism studies.

⁷⁰ Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke*, 173.

⁷¹ Berlin, "Meinecke and Historicism," 206.

⁷² *Ibid*, 173-174.

Early exponents of the organic view of the nation, such as Herder and Fichte, were initially suspicious of the role of state. In 1784, Herder wrote that it is “inconceivable that man is made for the state.”⁷³ For Herder, the state was an artificial institution, which was detrimental to human happiness. Similarly Fichte, in 1784, wrote that the “aim of all government is to make government superfluous.”⁷⁴ Yet, towards the close of the eighteenth up to the mid-nineteenth century, historicism underwent a shift of direction with regard to its perception of the role of the state, as the concept of the state in the nation and in society increasingly occupied a more central position.⁷⁵ Thus, by the early nineteenth century, “an aesthetic culturally oriented approach to nationality increasingly gave place to the ideal of the national state.”⁷⁶ The state began to be viewed in power-political terms in which it was assumed that, in pursuing its own power-political interests, states act in accord with a higher morality.⁷⁷ For many German historians Prussia became the focus of this new perspective as the political interests of the more often than not organic conception of the German nation “were increasingly identified with the power-political interests of the Prussian state.”⁷⁸

As discussed previously the practice of history, as undertaken by the Prussian school, was oriented towards the aim of facilitating the creation of a Prussian-led German nation-state. To achieve this outcome, Prussian historians such as Treitschke, Droysen and Sybel came to view the role of the state and its relationship to the individual in history in new ways. The subjugation of the individual to the will of the state, a

⁷³ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 42-43. An example of this change in posture was reflected in Fichte’s 1806 *Address to the German nation* in which he outlined the role of the state as the moral educator of the German nation.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 42.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 43.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

recurring motif in Treitschke's work, was an inherent component within this mentality as it was believed that the power of the state was the most significant measure of a society's health and success.

The Prussian historians believed that history led to a society wherein the individual would be freer and happier.⁷⁹ Unlike western liberalism, which conceived of the state as an instrument for the achievement of the welfare of the individual, the Prussian historians rejected the doctrine of the primacy of the individual and replaced it with the primacy of historical forces.⁸⁰ For the Prussian school, the state was not only a natural product of historical forces but also a positive good. In their view the state represented an "ethical value without which culture and morality were impossible."⁸¹ Consequently, the Prussian historians identified the state with power. In their conception, the state's power did not represent mere force, but was rather viewed as an "instrument to further the ethical aims of the state."⁸²

Droysen's conception of history and the relationship between the individual, the nation, and the state, is an instructive example as his conclusions strongly resemble many of Treitschke's points and are in general more comprehensible. Much like Treitschke, Droysen's basic political conviction was the primacy of the state over individual interests.⁸³ Droysen conceived of society as composed of groupings of communities. These were natural communities (i.e., family, community, nation—the Volk), communities of ideals (i.e., language, the arts and sciences, religion) and practical communities (i.e.,

⁷⁹ Ibid, 96.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 94.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, 96.

⁸³ Ibid, 104.

institutions of social control that maintained the harmony between competing interests). Droysen distinguished four practical communities: the spheres of society, the economy, law and power (the state).⁸⁴ In this rendering of society, Iggers writes, "the individual is ethical to the extent that he identifies himself with the community. For this reason, there is no morality apart from society and no universal ethical principles."⁸⁵ Much like Treitschke's assertion in *Politics* "that the state does not stand for the whole life of the nation," Droysen does not identify the ethical idea with the state alone, maintaining that the individual can belong to other ethical communities as well.⁸⁶ Rather, the state's role is that it enables these ethical forces to function and develop. Thus, for Droysen the relationship between the state's power and the ethical communities is reciprocal, as the communities depend on the state for their protection and freedom and the state depends on the wellbeing of these communities for its strength. Describing this relationship, Droysen states,

The state as a public force guarantees the security of all the ethical spheres within the state. These spheres sacrifice as much of their autonomy and self-determination as is necessary for the power (state) to be able to defend and represent them . . . [The state's] power is greatest when the health, liberty, and movement of all ethical spheres is most fully developed.⁸⁷

Therefore, Droysen reasons that because the state rests upon the great ethical communities, the interests of the state are identical with the demands of ethics. Thus, for society to function effectively the state had to be based upon power as it represented the only force in a position to act as an impersonal and impartial arbiter between the various

⁸⁴ Ibid, 113.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 114.

⁸⁶ Treitschke, *Politics*, 31. Chapter One discusses Treitschke's views on the subject.

⁸⁷ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 114.

spheres.⁸⁸ Therefore, individual interests, as represented by the ethical spheres, are required to submit to the power of the state in order to maintain themselves, thereby ensuring the continuance of the state's power.

Based on these assumptions Droysen rejects the notion of a government based upon popular sovereignty and bound by written guarantees of individual rights.⁸⁹ Rather, Droysen believes that government, by acting in the interests of the state, is the best guarantee of individual rights, as it furthered the aims of the ethical community. In this dynamic popular participation in government was immaterial.⁹⁰

Like Droysen, Sybel sees the state as a moral institution and thus saw individual interests as necessarily beneath those of the state. Sybel's position is based upon his conception of freedom, which for him did not represent "mere freedom of constraint" or what he describes as a "formal self-determination of the will without regard to the content of the will."⁹¹ Rather, Sybel views freedom as the "self-determination to attain culture and morality," which is part of the process of the "unfettered development of human nature."⁹² For Sybel, freedom was only possible within a community and under the guidance of the state as a moral institution. Thus, Sybel concludes "the state has power over the individuals, [and] that the latter owe obedience to the state and can achieve their

⁸⁸ Ibid, 114-115.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 107.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 115. Droysen describes why popular participation in government is unnecessary, as the following: "It doesn't matter whether the estates, by whatever manner they have been convened, have the right to add their two cents' worth. Voicing their opinion whether through corporative or representative organs is much less important than one thinks. The essence of a constitution consists in whether and to what extent the state is aware that if it wants to increase its power it must act not in an autocratic fashion but must pursue its great real interests. It is immaterial whether it asserts those great interests on the basis of public discussion, representation, or circumspect administration." Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, 117.

⁹² Ibid.

own freedom only through this obedience.”⁹³ Thus, Sybel contends that the state is “the realization of freedom through the power of the community” and that its task is “synonymous with the perfection of human culture.”⁹⁴

The significance of Droysen’s and Sybel’s views as they relate to Treitschke’s conception of the state, lie in their identification of the state as power. Unlike Droysen and Sybel, Treitschke comes to identify the state as power, not by its ability to further its ethical aim—though he does identify the state as a moral community—but through its ability to assert its will in its main functions as a legal and military power.⁹⁵ For Treitschke, the nation-state was power because it could assert itself against other nation-states as well as administer justice, not because it necessarily guaranteed the ethical life of its people. Thus, Treitschke holds a more naturalistic view of the state’s power compared to Droysen’s and Sybel’s view of power as an ethical force. Yet, Treitschke, Droysen and Sybel are in agreement as to the singular importance of the state as the power that rules over the conflicting interests of society. Moreover, all three believe that for society to function effectively, the individual must submit to the will of the state in order to ensure the continuance of its power. Bernhard Giesen explains the Prussian historians’ concern with power as a form of Realpolitik doctrine.⁹⁶ This characterization is particularly fitting with regard to Treitschke who described his first experience of reading Roachau’s *Foundations of Realpolitik* as akin to being struck by lightning, and he included it among the works which exerted the strongest influence upon his thinking.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 117-118.

⁹⁵ See chapter One and Treitschke, *Politics*, 14.

⁹⁶ Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation: Collective Identity in a German Axial Age*, 123-142.

⁹⁷ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 122. August Ludwig von Rochau was a nineteenth century German writer and politician who coined the phrase Realpolitik in his influential work *Foundations of*

Indeed, for Treitschke and his fellow Prussian historians, society, Giesen points out, was guided by “the law of the stronger” which was seen to exercise “a similar rule over state life as the law of gravity on the world of bodies.”⁹⁸ Thus, Droysen, Sybel and Treitschke all came to view the German nation-state as an “autonomous power concern” meaning that the sovereign state was based on a simple reality, its own power, thus, the sphere of state action became autonomous.⁹⁹ In this conception, the state, Giesen writes:

decouples itself from cultural foundations, and appears as a system that only relates to itself and its own dynamics of growth. The measure of the state’s exercise of power is ultimately only that of its long-term political success, i.e. the growth of that power itself. Political action loses superordinate values or goals, and is oriented only by its own measure: it becomes pure will, which increases itself as the will to be able to will ever more, in short: as the will to power.¹⁰⁰

Treitschke embraced this notion in his articulation of the nation-state as outlined in *Politics*. Indeed, Treitschke contends that the very genesis of a state occurs whenever a group or individual “has achieved sovereignty by imposing its will upon the whole body” of a community.¹⁰¹ For Treitschke, the state’s will to power represented the essence of the state and his primary concern was the continuance of the state’s ability to assert its will thereby allowing it to fulfill its primary functions as society’s legal and military authority.¹⁰² His demand that citizens submit to the state is based on his belief that the individual’s acquiescence is required by the state to accomplish its will, which he argued

Realpolitik. Rochau argued, “It is actually unreasonable to subordinate might to right. Only the stronger has and should have power.”

⁹⁸ Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation*, 132. Droysen wrote a nearly identical wording of this comment, stating: “In the world of politics the law of force has the same validity as the law of gravity in the physical world.” Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 114.

⁹⁹ Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation*, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 134.

¹⁰¹ Treitschke, *Politics*, 16.

¹⁰² See chapter One or Treitschke, *Politics*, 14. Treitschke makes this point clear stating “It is above all, Power which makes [the state’s] will to prevail.”

was ultimately beneficial for the individual.¹⁰³ As outlined above, this perspective was shared by the Prussian historians in general and reveals a conception of the nation-state that lacked any reference to the process of forming a democratic will.¹⁰⁴ For the Prussian historians “binding the state to the mere opinions of the majority risked the irresponsible rule of the mob” and thus was seen as a challenge to the state’s will to power.¹⁰⁵ As Giesen explains it, “The pure will to power in this way finds its expression in a nation-state purified of all reference to concrete individuals and concrete majorities. The diversity and mutability of majorities weakens the development of state power; the state must therefore be freed from these limitations upon its potentials.”¹⁰⁶ By envisioning the nation as the dynamic foundation of the state, the Prussian historians were able to reconcile the suppression of individual freedom to the state’s will to power. For the Prussian historians, Giesen explains, the citizen’s sense of belonging to the same nation

[rendered the] various and contradictory to appear unified and cohesive, *without*, requiring that the freedom of the citizens is suppressed in the process. As distinct from despotic rule, in which the will of the despot forces together the variety of citizens from the outside, the nation-state commands a foundation of integration and unity without force, shifted onto the individual citizen in agreement with his freedom.¹⁰⁷

Treitschke’s comments in *Politics* on the importance of the individual’s sense of national belonging, which he referred to as “patriotism” or “national honor,” exemplifies this position as he saw a citizen’s sense of national identity as an integral component to the “State’s will to prevail.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, for Treitschke and his fellow Prussian historians, the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation*, 134.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 135.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter One and Treitschke, *Politics*, 14.

individuals' sense of belonging to the same nation facilitated the bringing together of a people in a non-violent fashion thereby increasing the power of the state in absolute comparison to other states.¹⁰⁹ In Treitschke's case this conception of the nation-state ultimately revealed itself in his Pan-Germanism, his calls for German imperial expansion, and his glorification of war. As Giesen states,

If there is no true unity conceivable above and beyond the state, nothing higher that could gain and increase power for itself, then the relations between states become the ultimate field for the exercise of power, and all else, especially the domestic relations of a society must be subordinated to foreign policy . . . this primacy of foreign policy is absolute, and narrowly associated with the glorification of war as the act of power that cannot be surpassed . . . Violence and power are removed from domestic social relations, and shifted beyond the borders, to relations between states: society as a sphere of the regulated free self-determination of individuals, international anarchy as the realm of pure violence and will to power.¹¹⁰

As this chapter has demonstrated, Treitschke's view of the nation-state is representative of concepts and assumptions that existed as part of a larger historiographical discourse begun by the German romantic philosophers in the eighteenth century and continued by the German nationalist historians of the nineteenth century. Scholars have described this discourse as representative of a broader German "conception of History," an "ideology," a "philosophy of history" or a "mentality."¹¹¹ Whatever label one applies to it, its chief concern, as Lambert puts it, "was the question of how, exactly, the historical imagination should construct 'Germany'."¹¹² This process of imagining often envisioned the German nation-state as representing a contrast to the

¹⁰⁹ Giesen, *Intellectuals and the Nation*, 136.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Iggers, *The German Conception of History*; Mosse, *The Crisis of the German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*; Berlin, "Meinecke and Historicism"; and Lambert, "Paving the Peculiar Path" respectively.

¹¹² Lambert, "Paving the Peculiar Path", 93.

western European conception of a political nation-state with its emphasis on civil society, natural rights and social contracts.¹¹³ More specifically, the German vision of the nation-state, with its concern with the power of the state stood in stark contrast to the French nationalist discourse and its emphasis on its revolutionary heritage and the “role of the people” as the basis for claims of French “exceptionalism.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the discussion will now turn to the view of the nation-state as it was articulated in the French nationalist discourse and its relationship to Renan’s view of the nation.

Renan’s relationship to the view of the nation as it was articulated within the French national tradition differs from Treitschke’s in several respects. Unlike Treitschke, Renan was not a nationalist historian. He never wrote a multi-volume history of France and his legacy is not that of a “nation-builder” of the French national tradition. In nineteenth-century French historiography this title is reserved for the likes of Jules Michelet (1798-1874) and Ernest Lavisse (1842-1922) amongst others.¹¹⁵ Yet, themes in Renan’s work on nationality are representative of the view of the nation as it was

¹¹³ Ibid, 98. The issue of German intellectuals’ rejection of western concepts or norms is part of a broader historiographical discussion on the German *Sonderweg* (“special path”) and will not be taken up presently, as this discussion is limited to the view of the nation-state as it relates to Treitschke and Renan specifically. For discussion on the *Sonderweg* debate see, Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality*; David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984); Konrad Jarausch, “Illiberalism and Beyond: German History in Search of a Paradigm,” *The Journal of Modern History* 55, no 2 (June 1983): 268-284; Jürgen Kocka, “Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German *Sonderweg*,” *History and Theory* 38, no 1 (February 1999): 40-50; “German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German *Sonderweg*,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, no. 1 (January 1988) 3-16.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Pierre Nora contends that French national history is best represented by three main figures: Jules Michelet (1798-1874), Ernest Lavisse (1842-1922) and Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), each of whose methods epitomized the methodological practices of three eras of French national history. Pierre Nora, “From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory,” in *Rethinking the French Past of Memory: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xxiii.

proposed in the French national tradition, which was fashioned according to the so-called universal values of the French Revolution.¹¹⁶

In the nineteenth-century the French Revolution and the traditions associated with it functioned as the determining element in the construction of the French national identity.¹¹⁷ This was a period in which the heritage of the French Revolution was “slowly and painfully absorbed, expressed and domesticated” in French society.¹¹⁸ Part of this process was facilitated by the work of French nationalist historians such as Michelet and Lavissee. Through their references to France’s revolutionary past these historians created a dynamic in which, “the social order of the modern nation-state, rooted in the secularized traditions of the Republic, could be legitimized in a collective identity whose consciousness was based on a teleological view of the nation as pedagogical authority in the representation of its values.”¹¹⁹

Thus, for historians such as Michelet and Lavissee, history was a “patriotic mission” whose intended function was the strengthening of the French national consciousness.¹²⁰ Whereas Michelet’s approach was representative of French historiography’s romantic period, with its use of memoirs, narration and its celebration of revolutionary values, Lavissee’s approach was positivist in orientation as it sought to test the entire national tradition against documents in the archives.¹²¹

Renan’s ties to the French national tradition are located in the voluntarist aspects of his view of the nation, which has often been treated as indicative of a particularly

¹¹⁶ Lawrence D. Kritzmann, foreword to *Rethinking the French Past of Memory*, xiv.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, xiii.

¹¹⁸ David P. Jordan, introduction to *Rethinking France: The State*, by Pierre Nora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) xxiv.

¹¹⁹ Kritzmann, foreword to *Rethinking the French Past of Memory*, xiii.

¹²⁰ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 27.

¹²¹ Nora, *Rethinking France: The State*, xvi.

French style of nationalism that saw France as the ideal nation based upon the voluntary participation of its members. Indeed, as Smith demonstrates, the very roots of the voluntarist conception of the nation—of which Renan is arguably a leading progenitor—lie in an intellectual tradition started by Rousseau, and continued by the likes of Michelet and Lavissee, that saw the French nation-state as a contractual or voluntary association dedicated to liberty and justice.¹²² For instance, Rousseau's belief that sovereignty within a nation was based upon all individuals uniting in a compact and expressing their will in the "general will"¹²³ is certainly present in Renan's identification of a nation as "spiritual principle," which exists as a "large-scale solidarity" and expresses itself in day to day life as the "clearly expressed desire to live a common life."¹²⁴ Yet, whereas Rousseau saw the lifeblood of the nation in the patriotism of its members, Renan identifies the nation's spirit in the people's sense of shared history.

Analogous themes between Renan's thought and French nationalist historiography can also be discerned in the work of Michelet whose goal was to "integrate all the material and spiritual facts in an organic whole, a living entity" thus presenting France "as a soul and a person."¹²⁵ For example, Renan, in reference to the French Revolution, noted that it was France's "glory for having, through the French Revolution, proclaimed that a nation exists of itself" and asserted that "we should not be

¹²² Smith, *The Nation in History*, 7-9.

¹²³ Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of its Origins and Background*, 237-259. Rousseau's concept of a "general will" existed as the cement for his ideal community, what he termed an "austere democracy" that was to be based on reason, liberty, and good will. In such a community Kohn writes, the "general will," though it was the product of all the individual wills, could nevertheless be different from the single will, and yet was compatible with the free will of every member—because it was the expression not of anything accidental or arbitrary, but of the reasonable and the good, of that virtuous attitude which should animate each member." Ibid, 248-249.

¹²⁴ Renan, "What is a nation?," 19.

¹²⁵ Nora, "From Lieux de memoire to Realms of Memory," xxiii. While not of the same generation of Michelet, Renan was a life-long admirer of his work. Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 29, 57, 78, 97-98.

displeased if others imitate us in this. It was we who founded the principle of nationality."¹²⁶ These ideas were first formulated by Michelet in his monumental *History of France*, which portrayed the French revolution as the moment when nations, and France in particular, came into the final stage of self-consciousness.¹²⁷ Moreover, similarities between Michelet and Renan can be discerned by the central role both accord the people as the basis of nationality. By making the people the incarnation of nationality Michelet concluded that legitimacy and the right to act lay with the people rather than the state.¹²⁸ Similar themes exist in Lavissee's work, which also stressed the role of the French people as the foundation of the nation though under the guise of the notion of the *patrie*, or homeland, which he identified with the republic.¹²⁹ Like Michelet and Lavissee, Renan emphasizes the notion of the people as the embodiment of nationality. Throughout his discussion on nationality, in both the period of the Franco-Prussian war and later in *What is a nation?*, Renan repeatedly refers to the will or desires of a people as the decisive determinant of nationality. For example, in *What is a nation?* Renan states:

A nation has no more right than a king does to say to a province: 'You belong to me, I am seizing you.' A province, as far as I am concerned, is its inhabitants; if anyone has the right to be consulted in such an affair, it is the inhabitant. A nation never has any real interest in annexing or holding on to a country against its will. The wish of nations is, all in all, the sole legitimate criterion, the one to which one must always return.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Renan, "What is a nation?," 12. Lawrence makes a similar point in, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 37.

¹²⁷ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 25. Michelet's *History of France* comprises seventeen volumes, the first of which was published in 1833 and the last not until 1876.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 26.

¹²⁹ Nora, "Lavissee, The Nation's Teacher," 171. In 1882, the year in which Renan gave his celebrated lecture, Lavissee was rising to prominence as the foremost nationalist historian of the Third Republic.

¹³⁰ Renan, "What is a nation?," 19-20. See also Chapter 4.

Thus, by equating the desires of the people with the will of the nation, Renan reveals that his view of nationality is oriented by a fundamental recognition that nationality is bound to the perception a people have of themselves as a nationality and not according to some subjective criterion such as race or language. This does not imply that people can necessarily choose their nationality, as this is constituted by past political developments and manifested in a shared sense of identity, but that one nationality cannot claim another as its own if the latter do not consider themselves as members of that nationality.

Thus, elements of Renan's discussion on nationality are characteristic of the view of the French nation as it was put forth by the French national historians of his lifetime. Yet, unlike Michelet or Lavissee, Renan's discussion on nationality is largely devoid of the hyper-nationalism that was so prominent a feature within their work and nineteenth-century French national historiography in general. Renan's writing displays neither Michelet's religious conception of patriotism¹³¹ nor Lavissee's emphasis on the necessity of patriotic duty.¹³² While Renan often evokes a concern for France and its well-being, his discussion on the nation and nationality is not reflective of a tradition that sought to embolden the French national consciousness, despite the fact that he at times extolled the virtues of patriotism and its importance to the health of French society.¹³³ Thus, while Renan's views on nationality are, as Lawrence states, "rooted in a deep-seated love of France as a bastion of liberty and a storehouse for 'universal values,'" his discussion on

¹³¹ On Michelet see Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, 43-77.

¹³² Lavissee presented patriotic duty as the corollary of the Republic. The goal of Lavissee's patriotism, writes Nora, was "to meld three distinct notions into a single insoluble whole: a historical notion, *la patrie*; a political notion, the Republic; and a philosophical notion, liberty." Lavissee most successfully disseminated his national philosophy through his *petit Lavissee* textbooks, which were enormously influential upon a generation of French schoolchildren and contributed much to shaping the French national character. Nora, "Lavissee, The Nation's Teacher," 176, 180.

¹³³ See Chapter Four for discussion on *La Réforme la intellectuelle et Morale*.

nationality was not oriented towards the promotion of these values.¹³⁴ Chadbourne explains Renan's position as of one who "believed in the nation but not in nationalism."¹³⁵ In Renan's view, Chadbourne writes: "True patriotism, as [Renan] himself exemplified it, is the courage to declare one's nation mistaken when one believes that to be the truth. Pseudo-patriotism is to the nation what vanity is to the individual."¹³⁶ Indeed, Renan's writings on nationality are often marked by a general wariness towards the subject of nationalism. Renan feared that the exclusive concern with nationality would plunge the world into wars of extermination. His fundamental message was that nations and nationality should be viewed according to the precepts of reason and as part of a greater collective humanity.¹³⁷ "Human culture," he contends, antedates and is greater than national cultures.¹³⁸ While he considered nations as just and legitimate for nineteenth century European life, he reminds his listeners that nations and their concomitant nationalisms represent a temporary state of affairs and will probably be replaced by some form of "European federation."¹³⁹ Thus, while Renan's antipathy was most strongly directed towards the German organicist conception of the nation, his emphasis on humanity demonstrates a more general concern with nationalism in all its

¹³⁴ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 37.

¹³⁵ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 101.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ As quoted in Chapter Two, Renan asks his listener's to "not abandon the fundamental principle that man is a reasonable and moral being, before he is cooped up in such and such a language, before he is a member of such and such a race, before he belongs to such and such a culture. Before French, German, or Italian culture, there is human culture." Renan, "What is a nation?," 17.

¹³⁸ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 101.

¹³⁹ Renan, "What is a nation?," 20. See also Chapter Four. Renan's belief that nation's are not "eternal" is another example of how his views on nationality are contrary to views held by French nationalist historians such as Lavissee, who often referred to the concept of "eternal France." Brian Jenkins, *Nationalism in France: Class and Nation since 1789* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 83.

forms. For, Renan, Chadbourne correctly observes, the highest “ideal reality” was not the nation but humanity.¹⁴⁰

Arguably, Renan’s discussion on the nation and nationality is more closely tied to contemporary French historiography and the importance present-day French historians and nationalism scholars have placed upon collective memory as a source of the French national identity.¹⁴¹ As discussed in chapter two, Renan proposed the conjunction between collective memory and national identity, stating that a nation is based upon “a rich legacy of memories” and that the act of collective “forgetting” is a “crucial factor in the creation of a nation.”¹⁴² Robert Gildea also identifies the importance of collective memory on national identity, arguing that French political culture has been defined above all by its collective memory, which he defines as “a collective construction of the past by a given community.”¹⁴³ Pierre Nora comes to similar conclusions, arguing that French history and to a great extent what has served as the basis of French national identity are its *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory), which he defines as “an object, a place, an ideal transformed by human agency or time into ‘a symbolic element of the inherited touchstones of memory of a community’.”¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Nora contends:

The history of France’s development as a nation, has been our most powerful collective tradition, our *milieu de memoire par excellence* . . . France’s entire historical tradition has developed as a disciplined exercise

¹⁴⁰ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 101.

¹⁴¹ See, Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 1-13, 340-345. PNora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History Realms of Memory,” in *Rethinking the French Past of Memory: Conflicts and Divisions*, 1-20. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 187-206. Hue-Tam Ho Tai reviewing Nora’s *Lieux de memoire* makes a similar point. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, “Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory,” *The American Historical Review* 106 (June 2001): 912.

¹⁴² Renan, “What is a nation?,” 11, 19.

¹⁴³ Gildea, *The Past in French History*, 10.

¹⁴⁴ Jordan, introduction to *Rethinking France: The State*, by Pierre Nora, xxx.

of the mnemonic faculty, an instinctive delving into memory in order to reconstruct the past seamlessly and in its entirety.¹⁴⁵

Gildea's, and even more so Nora's work, looks at how French historians sought to reconstruct the past into this "seamless narrative" or "usable past" to meet present day demands. Renan—without the same benefit of hindsight—also recognized the power of historical practice in the construction of national identity by contending that history, through its illumination of a people's violent origins, poses a threat to nationality, as it challenges those cherished illusions that comprise a people's national consciousness.¹⁴⁶ Thus, whereas contemporary historiography now identifies the practice of history in the nineteenth century as a variety of nationalism in and of itself, Renan, as a historian in the nineteenth century, saw his practice as an objective science whose function was to reveal the truth of the past.¹⁴⁷ For Renan, history when practised in this way had the power to de-legitimize those foundational myths, which served as the basis for so much of European nationalist sentiment. Considering the politically charged climate of historiography that surrounded him, Renan's deconstruction of the nation and nationality is truly a testament to this belief.

¹⁴⁵ Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History Realms of Memory," 4-5.

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter Two.

¹⁴⁷ Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, 99.

Conclusion

By comparatively analyzing Treitschke's and Renan's views on the nation-state and nationality a few basic conclusions can be drawn. First, if, as it has been assumed in contemporary nationalism historiography, Renan's voluntarist conception of the nation and nationality in *What is a nation?* was a direct response to Treitschke's organicist conception of the nation and nationality, then it is apparent that Renan partially misinterpreted Treitschke's thoughts on the subject as he presented them in *Politics*. Lawrence, who posited that Renan's 1882 lecture was a direct response to Treitschke, makes this point, stating, "while Renan was perhaps correct to insist that racial explanations of national identity do not stand up to scientific scrutiny, he missed the important point that it is often not ethnicity itself, but a *belief* in ethnic coherence that matters—an issue raised by Treitschke."¹ Indeed, Treitschke's claim that a nation's perception of itself as an ethnically homogenous entity can be "either real or imaginary" demonstrates that he agreed with Renan's point that through the varied processes by which nation-states came into existence any semblance of ethnic coherence was lost. Moreover, Treitschke maintained that it is historically difficult to trace the "genealogical" foundations upon which nation-states were originally based.² Yet, Treitschke still identified the state's origins as primordial and reflective of a process by which people formed themselves into distinct ethnic enclaves. For Renan, the nation, and presumably, the state as well, were the products of modern political history and their existence, he contended, could not be discerned in the pre-modern past.

¹ Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory*, 36. Author's emphasis.

² See Chapter One.

The difference between Renan's and Treitschke's conceptions of the nation-state, as it relates to ethnicity, is the importance each accords ethnicity as a constituent feature of nationality. Despite Treitschke's awareness that modern nations are not always representative of a uniform ethnicity, in his conception of the state and in his arguments for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, he repeatedly cites ethnicity as a basis of nationality. In his arguments to justify the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine Treitschke referred to the existence of "common-blood" between the Alsatians and their German neighbors, thereby emphasizing the link between ethnicity and nationality. Treitschke's claims on this point were part of his appropriation of the broader Volk concept by which he sought to justify the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine according to the German character of the Alsatians and to a lesser extent the Lorrainers. While in *Politics* Treitschke identifies nationality as representative of common-blood, the emphasis he places upon this point is much less so than in his writings during the period of the Franco-Prussian war. Treitschke's inconsistency can be understood as a result of the political intent that guided his work and by what he saw as the different political demands of Germany's pre-unification and post-unification periods. In the period of the Franco-Prussian war Treitschke's arguments were orientated by what he perceived to be the "sacred necessity of these days" by which he meant the unification of the German nation-state. As a fervent supporter of Prussia's vocation to lead and unify Germany, Treitschke's argument was oriented in order to achieve this end and the appeal of the Volk concept to further this aim proved useful. In *Politics*, written following Germany's unification, Treitschke reoriented his thought in order to meet the demands of the Bismarckian state. In this context Treitschke no longer saw the need to stress the theme of common-blood but

rather to instill a sense of allegiance to the state as the moral, legal and military power that protected, organized and guaranteed the health of society. In contrast, Renan's discussion on nationality is devoid of the inconsistencies that plague Treitschke's thought. For Renan, German claims over Alsace-Lorraine according to an ethno-linguistic view of nationality as well as arguments positing Germany's historical right to the provinces, initiated his discussion on nationality as he was appalled at what he saw as the annexation of a people against their will. For Renan the experience of the war was especially disheartening as he was a life-long admirer of German culture and society and he had always envisioned France and Germany as united together in order to safeguard their shared ideals which he saw as the finest of European civilization. His discontent with German ethnographic politics ultimately culminated in *What is a nation?*, which sought to systematically discredit the ethno-linguistic view of the nation and to propose that nationality is based upon shared historical memories (and the forgetting of those memories) as well the shared desire to live a common life.

Perhaps the first fundamental divide that can be discerned between Treitschke's and Renan's writings on nationality is the question of the individual's own will or self-identity as an indicator of national identity. The implication of Treitschke's arguments is that they eliminated an individual's self-identification or national consciousness as a determinant of their nationality. For Treitschke national identity was a permanent feature, a mark of nature, which could not be altered or removed and thus was not contingent on an individual's awareness of himself or herself as belonging, or not belonging, to a nationality. For instance, Treitschke's argument that the Alsations' intrinsic German character rendered their protests against their annexation

inconsequential reveals a conception of nationality in which the Alsatians' self-perception of themselves as French, or not German, was immaterial, because according to the ethno-linguistic criteria, amongst others arguments, they were German. Thus, the implication is that nationality is not tied to an individual's perception of himself or herself as a member of such and such a nationality but determined by factors that are independent from the individual's own national consciousness. Consequently, Treitschke could claim that by being annexed into Germany the Alsatians were being restored to their true selves, irrespective of whether they knew this or not; hence, their opinions were irrelevant. Moreover, as members of the future German nation-state the Alsatians were subject to the same "moral imperatives" and "historical laws" that Treitschke outlined in his conception of the state, which demanded that the state's will required the submission of the individual. Treitschke's dismissal of a people's opinions as an indicator of nationality was precisely the crux of Renan's argument against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and ethnographic politics in general. For Renan, the concept of nationality had to be based upon a person's self-identification as a member of a nationality. Renan's view was thus indicative of the more generally held French view of nationality, which emphasized 'the people's' collective will as representative of national identity. Renan did not posit that a people could choose their nationality but contended that nationality was determined by a people's perception of themselves, and not according to any other criteria.

The second fundamental divide between Treitschke and Renan's conception of the nation-state and nationality are their views on humanity. Whereas Treitschke dismissed the notion of humanity, meaning viewing humankind as a united singular

entity, Renan viewed it as the highest ideal that humankind could aspire to. For Treitschke humankind was both naturally divided and unequal, and the formation of states was representative of this reality. Moreover, drawing from historicist thought and its rejection of natural law theory, Treitschke saw the nation-state as a self-contained personality, an individual, whose nature and values were unique and could not be understood in comparison to other nation-states. In the historicist conception of the nation-state, as it was proposed by the German Romantic philosophers and the Prussian historians, there were no universal values or laws applicable to humankind. A nation-state could only be understood according to the particulars of its own development, which was reflective of its unique nature. Thus, in Treitschke's interpretation of historicist principles, the nation-state and its concomitant nationality were held to be ideals which were superior to the ideal of humanity as any understanding of the world according to principles applicable to the whole of humankind was deemed to be invalid.

Renan's intellectual orientation was guided by the notion of humanity, which he believed antedated the formation of nation-states and their concomitant nationalities. While Renan accepted the existence of nations and saw them as necessary in his lifetime, he posited that they were not permanent features of human history but merely representative of the process by which European civilization had organized itself in the nineteenth century. He believed this reality would change and be replaced by a European Federation. While he never stated that this change would be beneficial for Europe, it seems likely that Renan felt that it would be, as he was an ardent promoter of internationalism and had called for the establishment of a European tribunal that could mediate national antagonisms and generally lessen the divisions between nation-states.

Indeed, Renan's discussion on the nation-state and nationality stemmed from his desire to, as he put it, "find a rational organization of mankind which would be as just as is humanely possible."³ Renan feared that national antagonisms, specifically those spurred on by ethnographic politics, would plunge the world into wars of extermination. For Treitschke, the very notion of a European international body which could stand above nation-states was contrary to the nature of States and hence nature itself.⁴ For Treitschke war could not be avoided, nor was its avoidance desirable, as international conflict was representative of the "beauty of History" by which states attain self-realization and exercise their inherent will.⁵

Treitschke and Renan's conceptions of the nation-state and nationality, when viewed according to their presentation in their main works, their responses to the Franco-Prussian war and the historiographical context in which they were produced, reveal that their debate was reflective of the underlying principles that guided each man's thought. For each, these principles oriented their discussion on the nation-state and nationality and what they saw as their place and meaning in human history.

³ Ernest Renan, to David Frederick Strauss, 15 September 1871, in Kohn, *The Making of the Modern French Mind*, 160.

⁴ Treitschke specifically rejects the concept of a "permanent international Arbitration court" in *Politics* according to these criteria. Treitschke, *Politics*, 17.

⁵ Treitschke, "Politics," in Davis, *The Political Thought of Heinrich von Treitschke*, 130.

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